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THE UMBRELLA THORN

Also by Peter de Polnay

Fiction—

ANGRY MAN'S TALE
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BOO
WATER ON THE STEPS
TWO MIRRORS

Non-Fiction—

DEATH AND TO-MORROW
A LETTER TO AN UNDERTAKER

PETER DE POLNAY

THE
UMBRELLA THORN

*O créature raisonnable
Qui désirez vie immortelle*

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TO WILLIAM GAUNT

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PART ONE

(I)

THE CORRIDOR OF THE NURSING HOME WAS SO PRIM and white that for a moment Miles Wace believed that he wasn't in Africa. A nurse stood beside an open door. He looked up and down, and as there were no natives visible he thought again that he might as well be back in England. The nurse came up to him. She had the habit of walking on tiptoe. "Mr. Wace?" she asked. She was smiling, and her smile was half congratulatory, half commiserating. In fact it was a nurse's smile.

"Yes," he said. "I am Mr. Wace."

He said that charmingly, for he had a charming smile and a charming voice. He had traded on his charm most of his life. He remembered that this was a special occasion, so his smile developed into a grin. "Where is my wife?" he asked.

"In here. She's rather tired. Please don't stay too long."

"Of course I won't," he said and followed the nurse into the room.

He bounced in and there in the bed was his wife Gloria, and he was suddenly frightened because she was her normal self. He had expected something altogether different. He had not slept last night and had had many fearful visions. An unusual experience for him. Now he didn't know what to say.

"Darling," she said. "Darling Miles."

"My poor darling," he said. "I do hope you're all right."

"I'm quite all right."

"You're wonderful," he said and wondered whether the nurse would stop him if he kissed her. The nurse stood smiling in the background and thought he was an exceedingly nice person.

"It wasn't so bad," Gloria said.

"You're the most wonderful woman in the world. And it's a boy. You're simply magnificent."

The nurse smiled no more: she was deeply moved. Such a sweet couple. The wife so pretty and the husband so tall and so fair: and how they loved each other. "I'm sure," she said in a low voice, "that you would like to see your son."

"Yes, please," Miles said. Gloria said nothing.

The nurse tiptoed out and Miles came nearer to the bed and took

his wife's hand. She had long fingers: they were thin and strong. She had a lot of chestnut hair which reached her shoulders. Her nose was straight and her lips were the lips of a small girl. She would have looked ravishing in an Edwardian riding habit. She was born and bred in Kensington.

As Miles took her hand she blew him a kiss, and then with endearing awkwardness he bent down and kissed her hand.

"You're a sweet person," she said.

"I was so worried."

"The doctor said I was very good."

The nurse came in with the newborn baby. The baby's face was like a bleached lemon. It was hardly a face at all. It opened its mouth in order to let out wind and now it resembled a sparrow waiting for a crumb. The baby had its father's blue eyes. "Isn't it a pet?" the nurse asked.

Miles was too moved to speak. "I think he's horrible," Gloria said. The baby opened its mouth. "Did you hear what your mummy said?" the nurse asked the baby.

The father wasn't listening to them. He gazed at the child and it took him a few endless minutes to sort his feelings. He started to perspire and he felt something heavy just above his knees. "But he is perfect," he exclaimed and his voice was loud and thick. He took a step forward and tentatively touched the baby. "And a boy, too," he said. "Oh nurse, I am so proud."

The nurse could have kissed him. Though she witnessed similar scenes at least once a day, she was overcome by his sincerity which, as a matter of fact, was his shop-window.

Gloria was getting tired. Nevertheless she enjoyed the scene and thought what a wonderful father her Miles would make. She gave the child a speculative earnest look, but then her eyes reverted to her husband's face. He had gently taken the baby's hand and kissed it. "You like kissing hands to-day, don't you?" she could not resist saying.

"I must take him back," the nurse said.

"Must you?" Miles asked sadly.

"I'm afraid so, but when you go you can have a look at him in the nursery."

"Goody," he said and his eyes followed the baby to the door.

"I don't know what's the matter with me," he said to Gloria, "but I could sit down and cry." And he added rather illogically, "Who said there is no God?"

"Darwin," Gloria said and laughed. Miles laughed obediently. Gloria was a Roman Catholic and because he loved her he had become

a Roman Catholic too; and therefore he was more serious about it. He sat down on the bed but suddenly jumped up.

"Darling," he said, "David must see his godson. He's outside in the car."

"Must you bring him up here?"

"It's the thing to do. It's going to be his godchild and he came down the whole way with me. I asked him to come. He was such a help."

"All right, lead him to me." She was exhausted. "I wish we didn't have to call the child David. It's such a stupid name."

"We'll call him Davy," Miles said and rushed from the room. He was in such a hurry that he forgot his terai and came hatless out into the glare. The hot Equatorial sun seemed to be waiting for him. The dreary vista of sunbaked Nairobi lay, as it were, at his feet. Here a six storey building, there a corrugated iron hut, and neither one nor the other was real, and the abomination of January heat sat straight and suffocatingly on the town and it wouldn't go till the long rains came, perhaps in March or perhaps much later. A boxbody Chevrolet stood near the nursing home entrance. Miles called out, "David, come and see your godson."

A dapper figure emerged from the car. David McKenna had a small moustache and the colour of his moustache was that of his hair, a light ginger. He had the figure a point to point rider would envy. He moved well. His gait belonged to that outward precision he had practised ever since he had left Loretto to go to Woolwich.

"Everything all right?" he asked.

"Everything perfect."

An elderly man came out of the building. "Hullo," shouted Miles. The man was mildly surprised as he was only a mere acquaintance. "My wife has had a baby. A boy. Do you know each other? Major McKenna . . . sorry, old boy, don't seem to remember your name. Come on David, hurry up." He ran into the house.

"You're very excited Miles," McKenna said.

"You'll be as excited as I when you see him. Hurry!"

"Does Gloria want to see me?"

"Of course, but we can't stay long, she's very tired."

Miles made a dash for the stairs. McKenna didn't dash, yet he didn't lag behind. They went to Gloria's room and McKenna said, "I am so glad, Gloria."

"Oh hullo," Gloria said and waved a tired hand.

"And you must be so pleased that it's a boy."

"The son and heir," Gloria said without irony, and she was too

tired to smile. She wanted to sleep and not to feel the pain which was coming on, and which she deeply resented. "Darling," she said, "I want to sleep. Please go but kiss me first."

Miles went over to the bed and she collected what strength the pain wasn't consuming and kissed him. Immense shadowy hands began to approach. There was somebody else in the room beside her husband. She had forgotten who it was. She made a tiny effort to try to remember who that other person could be; but she wasn't interested. If only the pain would go: and wasn't it silly that she was still kissing her husband notwithstanding the fact that he had left the room? The pain lifted for a second and sleep rushed in.

(II)

Outside in the corridor McKenna said, "She was so tired, poor thing."

"She has a wonderful constitution," Miles said and almost added, "I wish I had her strength." But he could not have said that. It was the unwritten law of his life never even to think of his weak heart. He was thoroughly ashamed of his weak heart. Foreigners and suchlike people should have weak hearts. Besides, now he had a son. His weak heart simply didn't exist. "Come," he said to McKenna, "and have a look at him."

It wasn't difficult to find the nursery. Shrill little wails came through a glass door and Miles opened the door with a proprietary movement. There were three cots in the room and the blinds were drawn. Each cot had a card attached to it and each card bore the name of the respective infant. Miles approved of that. It would have been terrible if they had mixed up the babies and instead of his handsome son another less agreeable child had been planted on him. He peered carefully at every label. He smiled knowingly.

"Here he is," he said. "Meet your godson, David."

He was wrong. The card said, "Rosamunde Dawson."

"I wish they would pull the blinds," he said petulantly.

"Here he is," McKenna said.

Miles came up and stood in awe and reverence before his son.

"What do you think of him?" he asked.

Rosamunde Dawson was shrieking in the next cot. "I really can't tell you," McKenna said. "I never saw a newborn baby before."

"He's beautiful."

McKenna examined the baby's face. The baby was asleep. "I'm sure he is," he said. He wished he could be more positive on the subject.

"David," Miles said affectionately, "you haven't much imagination. That comes of having been a regular soldier. But I hope you'll be a good godfather to him."

"I'll try to." He looked at another cot. There wasn't much difference between the babies. They were just new. As new as new dolls with the paint still wet on them. "The beginning," he said thoughtfully, though he had no idea why he said that.

A nurse came in.

"I suppose," Miles said, "that we're the unwanted guests." He used clichés pleasantly and the accompanying smile always gave them a touch of originality.

"Well," the nurse said, "feeding time in the zoo." That was her daily joke.

"Off we go," Miles said. He waved to the cot, waved to the nurse, took McKenna by the arm, and they left the nursing home.

It was eleven-thirty in the morning and a few white-grey clouds full of heat had come before the sun. They intensified the heat.

"We must go to the club and celebrate," Miles said.

"You look tired," McKenna said, letting in the clutch. "Why don't you have a little rest?"

"Rest? Now? Of course I look tired. You know what an awful night I had. A few drinks and I'll be as fit as a fiddle."

McKenna nodded and they drove to the club which was higher up and a little cooler.

Miles jumped out and made for the bar. McKenna watched him as he ran along. Miles was over six feet and he was slowly getting fat. The first heralds of obesity had begun to attend him. His movements betrayed the fat to come. He was thirty-four. What would he be like at forty? McKenna backed his car near to the bar entrance and alighted and followed his friend into the building. Miles was ordering drinks from the Goanese steward. There was only one man beside them in the bar. He was a stranger, though his corduroy shorts and checked shirt showed that he was a Highlands settler too. Of McKenna one wouldn't have believed that he also was a settler. His khaki topi, grey flannel suit, and shirt and a tie gave much more the impression of an official than of a settler. Miles, however, was the settler par excellence. A flaming red shirt, green corduroys and a terai as large as a lake were emblems of Gloria's taste.

"Pink gin?" he asked.

"Pink gin."

"And what about you, sir?" Miles asked the stranger.

"That's very decent of you, I'm sure," the stranger said.

"Not at all," Miles said. "I had a son this morning."

"That's something to be proud of," the stranger said and winked at McKenna.

The stranger, it appeared, came from Kitale and he and Miles were soon engrossed in politics. Round followed round and the stranger then left them because he had to go to his bank.

"What a nice man," Miles said.

"I suppose so," McKenna said. He couldn't easily take to strangers, a fact he often regretted.

"I'm going to have a whisky," Miles declared.

"You know one shouldn't drink whisky before sundown."

"Look here, David, you know as well as I that that is one of those absurd traditions which you chaps who have served in India have brought to the country. Steward!"

The steward came and he ordered himself a whisky and McKenna went on drinking pink gin. Emotion and the heat of the whisky filled Miles with many beautiful thoughts. Now he remembered that McKenna had said when looking at his son that it was the beginning. It was so wonderful to begin. To be able to start from scratch. He would see to it that his son should never have to regret that beginning. One's own life should be a lesson to others. Or rather a warning. Well, his wasn't a warning. He was happily married and the child would have a happy congenial home. Pity though that there was so little money. A long list of bills suddenly bobbed up. He pushed them down. You don't think of bills on such a great occasion. Anyway, it wasn't his fault that he hadn't made a success of farming. He wouldn't let his son become a farmer. Not he. "He won't be a farmer," he said aloud.

It was McKenna's turn. "Miles," he said, "go back to gin." "Gin be damned," Miles said, and the steward put another whisky before him. "I'm glad you'll be his godfather," he beamed.

That was a capital idea, even though Gloria didn't approve of it. But McKenna was a rich man and somehow, notwithstanding droughts and locusts, he had not lost money on farming. The trouble with him was that he had no imagination. He, Miles, had all the imagination in the world; and it hardly mattered that now and then it came to loggerheads with reality. "We shall have to put him down for a good school," he said. "Look who is here. Reggie, have you heard the great news?"

Reggie Newton was another neighbour of his. He was about forty-five years old, tall and dark, and believed in two things. First that he was very distinguished looking, and secondly that he had an exquisite, healthy, mannish sense of humour. He had a slightly

unfortunate protruding set of false teeth. His conversation was mostly unintelligible.

"My dear fellow, I'm delighted," he said. "Betty will shriek with joy."

McKenna wasn't certain whether he had said shriek or not. The false teeth clipped and often cut up his words.

"It's a boy," Miles said.

"Of course it's a boy," Reggie said, and ordered a round of drinks.

"Is Betty here?" Miles asked.

"She's on the farm."

"Pity she isn't here." He gulped down his drink. "Reggie, I want that boy to go a long way in life."

Reggie said he was sure the child would go a long way; or perhaps he said that the child wouldn't go a long way, or only a short way.

"You know that David will be the godfather."

"I know," Reggie said and then he said something about Scotsmen and McKenna suggested they should go and eat.

"Plenty of time," Miles said.

The bar was filling up. The insinuating atmosphere of drink and of conversation based on drink were the background of Miles's thoughts. He hadn't imagined that he could be so deeply moved and felt responsibility sitting heavily on his shoulders. Reggie was talking to him and to judge by the grin on his face, he must have been telling a funny story. A man not far from him was discoursing on the Legislative Council and poll tax. Miles wished that the world would leave him alone with his thoughts, plans and joy. He didn't mind McKenna. He was the child's godfather and thus had the right to enter into his thoughts, plans and sense of responsibility. For life wasn't an easy matter. It could be arduous and it was often like a boomerang. It may turn out to be as bad as not being at all. An interesting thought. He would have to discuss it with David. Now who was that man coming up to him? He couldn't recollect him but he looked a decent old geyzer.

"Congratulations," the man said and asked him to have a drink.

"Whisky and soda, please."

He giggled a little because he was such a popular fellow. With popularity half the battle was won. He was becoming silly, he said to himself. He lifted his glass. "My son." There was so much noise and chatter that nobody appeared to hear him excepting old David, but why did David look so anxious? He emptied his glass and Reggie mumbled something and he said, "Sorry, it's my round." He took a deep breath to shout for the steward and fell forward and died.

(III)

Near the central club building there were whitewashed guest houses. In the one nearest to the bar lay the body of Miles Wace. When it had been brought in and hastily deposited on the bed, it had torn part of the mosquito net off. Now the net partly covered the body. His personal boy looked in, and then, since his master's death meant metaphysically more to him than a white man could understand, he simply disappeared. The room was empty and apparently only the mosquito net seemed to bother about him. You bury people quickly in tropical countries, and so the body wouldn't stay much longer in the guest house. The club secretary had rooms in the main club building. The secretary, an ex-naval officer, was a man of few words. He always smiled a supercilious smile. He had acquired that smile because it saved him from laughing at everybody and everything. For him life was a joke. An expanding joke and as such it included death. "Who would have believed it?" he said. "He was a nice chap." He wouldn't have said that the day before. Miles owed the club money and the secretary was a loyal servant of the club. But you must give the dead a moratorium. At least till the will is opened.

"It doesn't surprise me," Reggie said. "He wasn't healthy." He shook his head. He always knew; at any rate five minutes after the event.

McKenna said nothing. He was facing a problem. The problem had been with him ever since the doctor had said that Miles was dead. It was a pity that the problem had bobbed up so soon. They were in the secretary's sitting room. Newton sat on the arm of a chair, tall and dark, and McKenna stood and stared hard at a picture of a Labrador. The picture was behind the secretary's head.

"You realize," McKenna said at last, "that somebody must go and tell his wife."

"I've been thinking of that ever since the poor blighter collapsed," Reggie said.

"What did you say?"

"The best thing would be if you drove up to Kampi ya Marwa and brought Betty down. She could tell Gloria."

"I don't understand you."

"Yes, you do," Reggie said. He opened his mouth and the false teeth grinned at McKenna.

"I haven't the slightest intention of driving to the farm and then driving back here."

The secretary sat with his smile and suddenly said, "Though it's a bit early, what about a drink?" And without waiting for them to reply, he called, "Boy."

A native came in and he ordered three whiskies.

"You always know the right answer," Reggie said. He turned to McKenna, "What about it?"

"It won't do," McKenna said and went to the window, and there before him was dust and on the other side of the dust the guest house in which lay the dead Miles. For a brief moment he asked himself why he had been devoted to that youngish man who hadn't much in common with him. He had liked him and he would miss him, though there had been times when Miles had bored him. But Miles didn't notice it and came back next day. You can't really dislike a person who is fond of you. Miles hadn't much of a personality. None the less he was a kindly man and the memory of his kindness would surely linger on. Or it wouldn't. Fundamentally the world had lost little through his death. McKenna took out his cigarette case and lit a cigarette. Nobody, he thought, had a right to pass judgment like that. His wife would miss him and the child would start life as an orphan. So perhaps, after all, the world had lost more than it had bargained for; the world being somewhat blind and not circumspect.

"If you want my candid opinion," Reggie told his teeth, "the whole thing is a bloody nuisance. That's exactly what I have against Africa. You must carry your neighbour's burden on your back."

The native servant came in with the drinks. The secretary poured the drinks out. He poured them out meticulously. A dispensing chemist would have envied him.

To be an orphan, thought McKenna, is to have an experience less and the road on which the orphan travels needs must be a narrow one. The life of a widow isn't really merry.

"Here is your drink," the secretary said.

"Thank you," said McKenna and came over from the window. The secretary handed him his glass. They looked at each other for an instant. There was more than understanding in that exchange of glances. Though they had belonged to different religious orders in their time, they had both taken the vows which last for a lifetime. And if the patron saint of one was Nelson, the other didn't lag behind with Gordon.

"I still maintain," Reggie said, "that we should have Betty here. Look here, McKenna. I'm a poor man. I can't afford to waste

petrol like that. What are 160 miles to you? Financially speaking nothing, ha, ha."

McKenna drank his whisky in slow gulps. He put the empty glass on the table. "I am going to the nursing home and I'm going to speak to her doctor." That was sensible, and he was a bit disappointed with himself for not having thought of that before. :

"We want Betty here," Reggie said. "She's the only person who could cope with the situation."

McKenna came out into the heat and the dust. The dead man lay over there. He wouldn't be there any more when he returned. That meant he would never see him again. Should he go in and, as they say, pay his last respects? A brief smile slightly lifted his moustache. It was just as well to start on memory right now. He went to his car, got into it, and as he drove out through the gate he saw his personal boy, Ali, gossiping with another boy beside the road.

"Where have you been?" he asked, stopping the car.

Ali said he had been to town and had made some purchases.

"Poor bwana Wace," Ali said, "he dead. "Very bad luck, sir." Ali hailed from Madagascar but spoke very little French. He spoke however, amazing English.

"We are going back to-night," McKenna said. "Go and pack my things."

"Sir, night very bad luck. Night no good shauri."

Ali was a Moslem but his faith in the prophet left him with darkness and in the night a far more ancient religion held its sway over him. The same religion which makes little children shriek at night.

"We're leaving to-night," McKenna said and drove off.

It was no good saying that Miles was dead and that was the end of it. It wasn't the end of it. In a sense it was the beginning of new movements and fresh complications. Nothing is simple. Not even death. He abruptly wondered whether the dead ever think of the mess and hard work they leave behind. He arrived at the nursing home and asked for the doctor. Which doctor? he was asked. The resident physician. That seemed a safe bet. The resident physician was out. Then any doctor would do. Perhaps Doctor O'Brien? Doctor O'Brien would do. He was taken to Doctor O'Brien.

Doctor O'Brien was a dark Irishman. He stood up as McKenna came in. "I think I know you," he said. "You're McKenna from Kampi ya Marwa."

That was one advantage of Kenya: you seldom met a complete stranger.

"I'm afraid I've come to ask you to help me," McKenna began. "A friend of mine, Miles Wace, died of heart failure at noon. His wife

is here. She gave birth to a boy early this morning. I can't very well go and tell her that her husband is dead. What should we do about it?"

It didn't sound like a problem now that he had put it so simply.

"Have a cigarette," he said.

"No, thank you. I'm not a smoker. Now and then I smoke a pipe. But only in the evening. I'm old-fashioned enough to believe that cigarette paper is no good for one." He laughed. Apparently he had made a joke.

"May I smoke?" McKenna asked.

"By all means."

The doctor watched him lighting his cigarette. He saw the sun-burnt hands that trembled a little, his eyes took in the straight, neat figure. "You look pretty fit," he said.

"I can't complain."

"We doctors would all go bust if we only had people like you to deal with." He raised his voice because a joke was coming. "Healthy people ought to be taxed. I bet you're fit enough to keep a couple of doctors going." He laughed.

"What are we going to do about Mrs. Wace?"

"Wait a moment," the doctor said.

The doctor went out and McKenna sat down. The doctor came back after five minutes.

"She's doing well," he said. "But of course you know what such a shock would mean to a woman. The very day she had her baby. I suppose husband and son almost met half way. You know, one coming, the other going. I wonder which of them was in the greater hurry." He chuckled. "We must give her a few days."

"Quite; but she will wonder why her husband isn't coming to see her. They are a devoted couple." He should have said were but he didn't bother to correct the tense.

"Can't you think of an excuse? You must make a story. Are you a relation?"

"I'm their neighbour and I'll be the child's godfather."

It was his turn to chuckle. He had disliked the idea of becoming a godfather. Anybody's godfather. When Miles had asked him for the first time he had said no. But you couldn't shake off Miles; now that he was dead it had become impossible to shake him off.

"I fear the godfather will have his hands full," Doctor O'Brien said. "What about that story?"

"I'm not good at stories, but I'll tell you what we should do. Go in and tell her that her husband was here while she slept and he had to return to the farm at once as East Coast Fever has broken out. Tell her he'll be back on Friday."

"That's a jolly good yarn," the doctor said. "In five days' time she'll be strong enough to take the news. She's a strong wench if there ever was one."

"You delivered the child?"

"I delivered the child."

The doctor got up and McKenna got up. They walked to the door.

"You'll be back on Friday?" the doctor asked.

"I believe so. Don't let anybody visit her in the meantime."

"I'll see to that." McKenna seemed to be waiting for something.

"Is there anything else I can do for you?"

"May I wait here till you have seen her?"

The doctor smiled. "The pedantic regular army officer. All right, I'll go and tell her."

McKenna waited in the corridor. The corridor was empty. He could hear the doctor's returning footsteps.

"She was a little worried," the doctor said. "But she's full of dope, so she won't worry much."

"Do you think I could have another look at the child?"

"Come this way."

They went to the nursery and because it was past four o'clock and therefore the sun was milder, the blind was up and the cots were no more in the semi-darkness of the morning.

The Wace baby was howling. It was a thin howl. There was as yet no strength to it. Consequently there was something almost uncanny about it. McKenna looked at the child for a couple of seconds. "Is he in pain?" he asked.

"No."

"Then why does he wail?"

"Babies always wail." That was another joke.

"I see," said McKenna and started for the door.

"Rather a pretty baby," the doctor said.

"I don't know much about newborn babies."

"Are you a bachelor?"

"In a way."

The doctor winked. "Now what exactly do you mean by that?"

"If you must know I was married once but that was so long ago that I've quite forgotten it."

"But you're quite a young man."

"I'm forty-one."

"That's young."

He wished he could be rid of the doctor.

"You were of course in the army," the doctor said. "It's written all over you. Which regiment were you in? Cavalry?"

"No, sappers."

"Did you like it?"

"I loved it."

"Should have stayed in the army. This country is full of blokes who are miserable because they've become civilians."

McKenna didn't answer. They had reached the front door. "You must come down some day to the Nairobi Club and have a sun-downer with me," said the indomitable doctor.

"I'll see you on Friday."

(IV)

At two in the morning the car had reached Uplands and the descent down the escarpment began. "She is bad place," Ali said. He said that whenever they travelled along the escarpment. The night was black, the late moon hadn't yet appeared. There were the many eerie sounds of the African night and down in the valley it would be hot. McKenna wished that he could hear the clanking of chains and see the procession of phantom slaves being driven along that ancient slave route. For as legend and superstition would have it on calm nights you could still hear the chains of the slaves on their way to the sea where traders were waiting for them. Would he be frightened? He thought it would be disappointing if he weren't frightened. He sighed because he would never hear them. He knew his limitations.

A pair of red eyes were now ahead of him and then they disappeared and the car continued to descend into the tropical cauldron.

"Did you hear that?" he asked.

"Sir, please what?"

"Nothing. Don't get frightened. Nothing."

It had been just a trick of his imagination but he had distinctly heard the wail of that baby. That wail belonged to the night. The child was wailing and its father was dead. He pulled himself up. He must be careful not to fall asleep. The car could crash only too easily into the dark and the deep of the valley. Anyway the child wouldn't understand its loss. Not even in ten years' time. You can't weep for something you don't know and don't understand.

"Sir, a simba," whispered Ali.

"Don't be a bumbafu. It's a rabbit."

The eyes disappeared and he stopped the car to light a cigarette. Hyenas were hooting as an eternal background.

"Trouble with motor-car?" Ali asked.

He had visions of spending the night there on the escarpment and bad dark figures of the colour of the night would come and would lift him out of the car and take him away and that would be the end of him.

They drove on and they had passed Gilgil when the dawn came. It came suddenly and quickly turned into daytime. It was now less than sixty miles to his farm. Ali was sleeping in the back of the car and McKenna was thinking of the Wace financial situation. It couldn't be good. In Kenya you know what your neighbour eats and thinks notwithstanding the fact that your next-door neighbour might not be nearer to you than fifteen miles as the crow flies. So he knew that Miles had been hard up. The wife had a small income of her own. How small he didn't know; nor did he know how hard up the husband had been. She would probably sell up the farm and go back to England. That would be the end of his godfatherhood. So there was no reason to be bothered about the whole thing. None whatsoever.

A herd of impala were crossing the road. Their golden bodies were picked out by the sun. They were as beautiful as nymphs in a wood. A young buck that had strayed away came leaping along and leapt over the road and only the wings were missing. McKenna was hungry and sleepy, and he wanted first to sleep and then to breakfast. He accelerated the car.

He hadn't liked the doctor. An inquisitive man, and he shrunk from people who asked questions. And he was hearty. He preferred to give hearty people a wide berth. Moreover, what had it to do with the doctor whether he was married? A triumphant smile hovered round his mouth. He had killed the memory of his wife so completely, that provided he cared to talk of her he could do so no more. That was rather an achievement, though sometimes he regretted it. He regretted it that moment and tried to conjure her up in order to look at her and then to close his mental eye. It was a hopeless effort. Oh damn, he said to himself, one does get tired after a whole night's drive. There was a bottle of brandy in the car. He stopped the car, Ali didn't wake up and he took the bottle and drank a few drops of brandy. That was better. As he drove on he thought of the time when he had drunk a lot. Lot was a mild word for it. It didn't help and nowadays he drank moderately and that didn't help either. Help what? He wished he knew. He yawned and he began to drive really fast.

He arrived at his farm at seven in the morning. As he crossed the bridge near the river which was the boundary of the farm, he could

hear the cows lowing; as he reached the top of the escarpment on which his house stood he saw the Wanderobo herd driving his three Shorthorn bulls down the incline.

"I'm going to sleep till nine," he said to Ali. "Breakfast at quarter past nine."

"Yes sir, very good," said Ali.

Time was McKenna's bugbear. If you live alone, far from any sort of organisation, you must do your own organising. And time is the first item in any organisation. So breakfast would have to be at nine-fifteen sharp. If it were at nine-twenty he might have to give up a lot, himself included. He went into the sitting-room. The sitting-room was tidy, everything was in its place. He opened the bedroom door. Within three minutes he was in his pyjamas.

He ought to go up to the boma before retiring to bed. But as he had said to Ali that he would first have a rest, it was now too late to change his mind. He should have thought of that before. It wouldn't do to change an order so soon. As his mind said the word order he wasn't thinking of his servant but of himself. He heard whimpering outside his door. He opened it and a procession filed in. Two golden retrievers, a nondescript terrier and a basset hound. They made much fuss of him.

"I want to sleep," he said. "Get out."

The retrievers left and the terrier went with them; the basset hound stayed behind. The clock pointed to seven minutes past seven. McKenna patted the dog, got into bed and pulled the blanket up to his waist. Within a few seconds he was asleep.

The basset hound, middle aged and fat, sat on his haunches and contemplated him with loving care. There wasn't much visible of his master's face. Even in bed the hair was unruffled and the parting wasn't disturbed. The left cheek was red and above the cheekbone there were a couple of light blue veins. Generally speaking it was a young face. The mouth was a little open and the teeth were perfect. The basset hound heaved a deep sigh, scratched himself and there was profound wisdom in his eyes. He sighed again, lay down on his side and slid into cosy slumber. Some bees that lived under the boards came out and buzzed round angrily. Neither master nor dog cared a rap. One of the bees flew out through the window into the bright heat.

The heat was mounting and Ali stood outside the house doing beautifully nothing. His eyes gazed past the cacti, atrocious monsters which the previous owner of the farm, a retired brigadier with more than his share of malaria, loved and admired a lot. A dusty fig tree was in the middle of the compound. A couple of gum trees,

sordid as telegraph poles, were behind the kitchen. Two guest houses and the office were on the right. They were built of cedar wood. The house itself was of stone and it looked heavy, and once a visitor had cracked the joke that it reminded him of Aberdeen. McKenna smiled and remarked that it had been built by the late owner who had hailed from Surrey.

Slowly Ali came out of his reverie. The roses which grew all round the house and which were McKenna's innovation, were of no interest to him. But his eyes focused on the kitchen entrance and he began to listen avidly. An argument was going on between the cook and the water-cart boy. Pity that they spoke in Kikuyu; he couldn't understand a word. The retrievers stood side by side. The bitch was deticking the dog. The terrier, since he knew that as a good Moslem Ali abhorred him and wouldn't touch him, trotted up and sniffed Ali's naked feet. "Goddam bitch," Ali said in his best English. The terrier wagged his tail. He was a dog and so the offence had no meaning.

Ali glanced at his wrist-watch. The wrist-watch was the pride of his life and he liked looking at it and showing it off before the Kikuyu house servants. The Kikuyus didn't care. They were not interested in him and much less in time. The watch said that it was nearly nine. He must prepare breakfast. He hurried to the cook and shouted, "Pesi, breakfast for the bwana." The cook nodded and went on growling at the water-cart boy: Ali returned to his reverie. It was all about a woman. His friend Achmed, another native of Madagascar, the steward of the local Gymkhana Club fifteen miles away, had had a Nandi tart. She was good to look at as Nandi women usually are and he wanted to be rid of her. He had offered her to Ali. He had, so to speak, first refusal of the woman. It would be grand to have a woman like that for a month or two. But to have a bibi in one's hut meant parting with a bit of cash. He was in a dilemma, for he was saving up for a gramophone and some records in Kiswahili. He sighed. It would be the gramophone and not lust. He looked at his watch and it was nine-fourteen. He went into the house and woke McKenna. "Sir, hot water coming," he said and went to the hot-water tank which was in the compound beside the kitchen and filled a jug with steaming water and took it into the bedroom. "Cold water coming now," he said. "Sir, later," he added and took another jug and went out for cold water.

McKenna awoke with pins and needles pricking him. And as it happens on such occasions it took him some time to find out what it was that was worrying him and must have worried him during his sleep. He didn't need to concentrate for long. Of course; Miles

Wace had died and he was going to be the orphan's godfather. He should go over to Miles's farm and see how things were over there. That would have to wait till the afternoon.

There was a long verandah in front of the sitting-room. It was his habit to take his breakfast on the verandah. Bacon and eggs. He breakfasted on bacon and eggs every day. It took him less than ten minutes to eat his breakfast. "Send Masai to me," he said when he had finished. Ali went out to fetch Masai, and he waited and lit a cigarette and then went out, too, and met Masai who was coming towards the house. He smiled at the huge native. He liked him.

Masai was a fine Negro. He was half Masai, half Kikuyu and the mixture of nomad and cultivator had worked well in his case. He had the industry of the Kikuyu coupled with the courage and manliness of the Masai. He was the head cattle-man and McKenna knew that he could rely on him.

"Any news?" he asked.

"Two calves dead," Masai said.

Paratyphoid, McKenna said to himself. "Slides?" he asked. Masai proudly told him that the laboratory slides were in the office. McKenna nodded approvingly. He had taught Masai how to post-mortem cattle and how to use slides. He didn't send the slides to the Government laboratory: he had the apparatus to deal with them. It had taken him two years to learn the use of the microscope; it took Masai four years to grasp to what purpose a slide was used. Nowadays they were both satisfied with their personal achievements.

"I think, bwana, there are lions about," Masai said in the voice of the eternal peasant prophesying hail.

"The place is full of zebra," McKenna said. "I saw them from the car."

His Swahili was as poor as that of Masai, therefore neither of them wasted words on elaborate conversation.

"A Lumbwa herd saw a lion," Masai said.

"Far?"

"Not far. We must kill the lion."

Years ago a lion had come on a dark night and killed four cows. Next night the lion came again and McKenna shot it. Masai had followed him. He had one of McKenna's rifles. When they returned he gave the rifle back. "I wanted to help," he said. McKenna then found out that Masai who was a bit hazy about rifles had forgotten to take ammunition along.

"We must chase the zebra off," McKenna said.

The basset hound came out of the house and sat down beside him. "A little exercise will do you good," he said. He turned back to

Masai. "I'm going to the dip." He went to the house and put on his terai. In Nairobi he wore a topi but on the farm always a terai. The terai was a simple affair. He wore it as a protection against the sun and not to preen himself. He stood for a few minutes on the verandah. All the dogs were with him, and the retriever bitch was deticking the terrier who sat there like a martyr, now and then snapping at an especially bloated tick. "Couldn't you do it elsewhere?" McKenna asked.

The house was on top of a ridge and the ridge was precisely in the middle of the farm. The brigadier had had his house on the other side of the island which was formed by the river and a long dead tributary. The tributary had ceased to flow when the P.W.D. people had tried to drain the swamp. The sole result of their work was the murder of the tributary, and consequently the decay of the vegetation on the island. McKenna hadn't liked the other house. It was on the edge of the farm and that was against his principles and training. You must be in the centre of your work or job. There was another reason why he did not fancy that house on the other side of the island. From that house you could see Mount Kenya in all the glory of its snow-covered peak. A long vista of thorn trees and bushes led to the foot of the mountain. It was a too sumptuous sight for his liking. The former owner had had a manager and on the middle ridge built him the stone house. McKenna chose to live in the stone house. Slowly he carted the cedar house log by log, board by board, up to the ridge and now it was the two guest houses and the office.

Back of the ridge was a deep depression with another dry river bed. Bush; but the bush had mostly been cleared by the Kikuyu squatters who had built their huts there. Their maize shambas were behind the swamp. The swamp spread fifteen miles and pythons and other monsters lived in it. If you walked on the edge of the swamp you could hear wild dogs barking and many sinister sounds trickled through the walls of papyrus reeds and the smell of deep stagnant water was continuously present. But the swamp afforded excellent duck shooting during the rainy season and in November spur winged geese arrived; and McKenna was a good shot.

On the other side of the depression the land mounted steeply. McKenna's farm was an intermediary between the stoney world of six thousand feet above sea-level and the cedar forest and lush grass of seven thousand feet above sea-level. The back of the farm just reached the level where umbrella thorns flourish. When there was a bad year Reggie Newton would tell his teeth that McKenna had the worse of two worlds. He threw away his cigarette and accompanied by the dogs went down to the dip. He stood beside the dip and watched

his cattle plunge into Mr. Cooper's mixture. His cattle were good high-grade cattle. Many of the cows and even more of the calves looked like good Shorthorns. There were none of the native Boran cattle left. Without undue effort but in complete control of his plans and never relenting, he had graded up the cattle and the settlers in the district said that he was a first-class farmer and knew a lot about cattle. In his heart of hearts, the existence of which he very much doubted, he was aware that he was not a keen farmer and his knowledge of cattle was shaky. He had been a good soldier and would still be a good soldier if he had not left the army. But his success at farming was caused by the strength of frustration and by the self-discipline which he had to impose on himself from childhood onward, and somehow he had never had a chance to relax it. But probably, he believed, that was all to the good.

The bulls came last. The first of them arrived and looked down into the murky water and snorted, and that sounded like a sigh. A sigh of disgust. A native egged it on with a stick. The bull trembled and then it jumped. When the third bull emerged out of the dip McKenna called the dogs and walked back to the house.

He must examine those slides. In the afternoon he would go across to Miles's farm. He reached the top of the ridge and there was Masai.

"Masai," he said, "Bwana Wace is dead."

"Dead? A bad shauri."

"A very bad one. But Memsahib Wace had a son the same day." Masai stared at him. That intermingling of life and death, and that coming and going without a specified purpose were too complicated for his simple mind. So he shook his head and asked for the key of the maize store.

(V)

Doctor O'Brien had an excellent liver. He was a good centre half too. Life held few problems for him, and he liked life as much as a man with a good appetite and a good digestion might like a juicy red steak. He sat in his room and the windows were open and the hot clouds were over Nairobi. There came a knock on his door and he called out a hearty "come in."

The matron came in. "You want to make the round, doctor?" she asked.

He jumped up, nearly upsetting his chair. "Of course, matron. Nothing I want more." And he gave her a large boyish smile. The matron didn't smile. Life for her was far more complex. In a sense

she envied the ebullient doctor; but he irritated her too. As they left the room she thought that it was easy for him since he had far less worries than she. If only he had to look after all those nurses he would be as sour as she was. Naturally she didn't flatter herself with the word sour. She considered herself a just and grave woman.

First they went to the rooms with two beds; then they went to the more select ones with one bed. The last room at the end of the corridor was Gloria Wace's room. She was feeding the baby out of the bottle as they came in. She was learning the trick quickly. She was the sort of woman who masters most tricks, provided she took the trouble to master them. She seldom took the trouble and that had the advantage of leaving her more vigorous and readier for the tricks she liked.

"How are we this morning?" Doctor O'Brien asked.

That was his stereotype question. Since he included his hearty self it was well-nigh impossible for his patients to utter a complaint.

"I am very well, doctor," Gloria said. She had a deep voice, though now and then it was perhaps a little too perfect. She lay great emphasis on her consonants.

"And the son and heir?" Doctor O'Brien asked. "Hale and hearty?"

"He seems all right," Gloria said and smiled and patted the baby's cheek. The baby opened its mouth and she gave it the bottle again.

"You should have brought up the wind first," the matron said. So very obediently Gloria took the bottle from the baby and held the baby up and patted its back, and the baby brought up the wind and everything was as it should be.

Doctor O'Brien looked out through the window, then looked at the chart and he was ready to leave the room. In a couple of hours' time his duties would be over and in the evening he would play bridge in the house of a member of the Secretariat. He was a keen bridge player and a good one at that. "You're doing remarkably well, Mrs. Wace," he said, and Gloria gave him a smile and he smiled his boyish centre-half smile. The door opened softly and a nurse put her head in. She caught sight of the doctor and was going to withdraw her head respectfully when Doctor O'Brien asked her what she wanted.

"I came for the baby, doctor," she said.

"Take him, we have finished in here," he said and gave the matron the look which the matron invariably interpreted correctly, and as the nurse came in the matron began to move towards the door, having already given Gloria a farewell for the present smile. But just then something began to move in Doctor O'Brien's mind. He had been

thinking of his parents' home in County Galway and of the cupboard in which he used to keep during his holidays his tennis racket and cricket bat. Now all that vanished. What was there about Mrs. Wace that made her name so familiar? Not her case history. Of that he was certain. The woman was strong and it was the simplest and most gratifying maternity case any gynæcologist could wish for. Good God! There it was. Her husband had died the day she gave birth to the child. That was three days ago. Suddenly he saw McKenna's face. He was the husband's friend and had come to ask him to keep everybody away from the wife because she was not well enough to hear the sad news. And he, the friend, had said that he would come back on Friday to Nairobi in order to tell her. Rather presumptuous, if he came to think of it. Such tasks should be left to doctors. Besides, he hadn't a high opinion of that chap. He was an army man and Doctor O'Brien had little time for army men. They were unscientific, lacked understanding and were conceited and vain. Professional soldiers had no tact, that man with the figure of a jockey was surely the last person on earth to impart news of that kind. He would bungle it from the word go. Doctor O'Brien's cheeks turned red. He was surprised at the excitement that was travelling up and down his body.

However, the explanation was simple enough. Life had been a friend, though a somewhat distant friend to him. No great experience had come his way. He wasn't one of the actors. He sat in the stalls and he was the first to admit that it was mighty comfortable to sit in the stalls. Nevertheless occasionally he had felt a desire to appear on the stage, be his part ever so humble. And now the opportunity had come. He would bounce on to the stage and for a brief ten minutes would be moving among the actors and his lines would be important, and they would, as it were, bring down the curtain.

"Nurse," he said, "do leave the baby here for a few more minutes. I'm sure Mrs. Wace will enjoy that."

The nurse put the baby back on the bed. Doctor O'Brien smiled. He was a good stage manager. The baby in her arms would add to the general effect and would be further proof of his understanding and tact. "Thank you, matron," he said. "I should like to have a few words in private with Mrs. Wace."

Matron and nurse went out and with a kindly, he hoped brotherly, smile he looked at Gloria. She was slightly dismayed. His comforting smile grew in size.

"Oh doctor," she said, "I hope it's not about the bill."

"What bill?" he asked.

"The bill here."

"I have nothing to do with that," he said and frowned because he didn't want the dramatic interview to start off so sordidly.

"My husband will be back any time and he'll settle it," she said.

That was the moment to make the great statement. Your husband, he should say, will never pay a bill again. But that would sound stupid. It would smack of that famous rat-poison advertisement in which the bereaved rat-husband tells rat-butler that madam will never eat again. Moreover, it would be brutal: worthy of that soldier man.

"I'm sure," he said. "Anyway, lurid finances are the secretary's job."

Reassured Gloria began to fondle the baby.

"Though I've seen many babies coming into the world," said Doctor O'Brien, "I always feel moved when I contemplate a new-born being." He liked that. He had a fine choice of words. "I always say to myself on such occasions that the world is richer. One new being to take the place of one who has departed."

Gloria looked at him, then at the baby and said nothing to encourage him.

"Whenever we look at a new being, Mrs. Wace, we must think too of those who have left the world."

"Doctor, you'll make me quite morbid," Gloria said.

"On the contrary," he said.

But she was no good. He should have been acting that scene with a better actress. She didn't know her cues. That made him impatient. "On the contrary," he said again. "To enjoy life carries with it the responsibility of thinking of the dead. We must have strength to understand death as much as we can understand birth. In a sense they're much of a muchness."

"I don't agree with you," Gloria said. She disliked what she would have defined as metaphysics. "But of course I see your point." That was a cocktail party remark, but she knew a large variety of noncommittal cocktail party remarks.

Doctor O'Brien had almost enough of it. But as he wasn't the man to retreat he decided to tell her there and then.

"Mrs. Wace, I'm not the man to beat about the bush and I can see with my doctor's eye that you're a brave, strong woman. Besides, the birth of your son must have filled you with such joy that I know you will have the humility and the strength to take sad news."

It was better than he had expected. Her face went white. As though an invisible but very efficient pump had sucked the blood out of it. Her mouth was half open. The child lay flat on her knees. She seemed to have forgotten it.

"Mrs. Wace," he said, "I'm afraid it's my sad duty to tell you that

whilst you were rightfully enjoying the glory of motherhood, your husband died of a heart attack."

"No," she said. The word no had been formulated in her mind before he had finished the sentence.

"I'm afraid it is true," he said. He wagged his head and added, "I'm sorry."

His voice was flat. He was bitterly repenting that he had left the stalls. The poor woman. Poor miserable creature. He wanted to be miles away. She was shrieking. He didn't listen. He wouldn't hear her. He must leave the room. He must go and play bridge. He must go. Go. But that moment she made a movement as if to sweep the child off the bed, and he jumped forward and just managed to stop her in time.

"What are you doing?" he asked superfluously. He gathered up the baby and held it in his arms. The baby was asleep and had no intention of waking up.

"I don't want him," she shouted. "Take him away."

"But, Mrs. Wace, you're his mother."

"But Miles is dead. I want Miles. I don't want this . . ."

She couldn't find the right word.

"I think," he said, "I'd better take the baby to the nursery."

"Take it," she shouted, "I never want to see it again."

A thought came to him.

"But think what your husband will say up there." He pointed to the ceiling, and now there was nothing theatrical about him. The man in the stalls was lifting his arm: that was all. She didn't answer. She looked at him and then she turned her head away. Her neck was glistening with tears.

"Mrs. Wace," he said, "supposing when your husband died his spirit entered this child. Supposing it's really him. That is the way you should look at him. It's your husband's soul in a young body."

He was sincere and meant every word of it. Gloria stared at him for an endless second.

"I don't," she said slowly, "want Miles to be my son. I want him to be my husband. Here beside me." And with her fist she hit the bedclothes where the baby had been a few minutes ago.

"I . . ." he said, but words had become useless. She turned her whole body away from him and started to shriek. They weren't piercing shrieks. They were like angry moans.

"I believe . . ." he began and left it at that. He rang the bell and as he went out the nurse came and he handed the baby to her and told her to take it to the nursery and then to hurry back because he would have to give Mrs. Wace a morphine injection. He was now matter-of-fact.

From behind the Aberdares a long procession of thunder-filled clouds appeared. It was three in the afternoon and the uninitiated would easily have thought that rain was coming. But there would be no rain. The wind that had brought the clouds along lifted the dust and the dust whirled and rose cone-like. Those cabinet editions of a tornado settled down on the dry grass and the red stones. On the road leading to the township an Indian lorry-driver saw that the road in front of his lorry was running into a blue lagoon. He wasn't interested. He was hot and full of onions and ghee. Hence he had no time for mirages.

McKenna was walking along the furrow and there the world was fresh and full of hope. Wild asparagus, large bushes, and as a contrast the decaying trees of the dead island. The trees near the furrow, however, had a new lease of life. It was an industrious furrow. He had seen to it. The water flowed in the furrow and it was as green as the grass. The vegetable garden was between the furrow and the swamp. A couple of natives were working there. He stopped, and leaning on his stick he watched the natives for a few minutes. He had trained his eyes to take in most things without having to focus them. He seemed almost lost in a dream. Far away two toucans rose and the noise they made was a cross between rattling of tins and lost souls shrieking in torment. The dogs lifted their heads and then forgot the toucans and went on circling till there came terrifying barking and rushing and anger. The dogs soon had their victim and they would smell badly for the rest of the day: the penalty for killing a mongoose. McKenna walked to the edge of the vegetable garden. One of the boys came up to him and said that monkeys were about and had done a certain amount of mischief in the garden. If only, McKenna thought, one could spend one's whole day and night killing, then things would go more according to plan. He was the last person who would have fancied day and night killing. Therefore all he could do was to curtail his planning. Perhaps that was why he prospered in Kenya. He looked at the potatoes and further on at the sweet potatoes. With his stick he touched the muddy soil. "You mustn't flood too often," he said and went his way.

It was a good three miles walk to the Wace farm. He did not ride and he had no horses. It was not a matter of being afraid of the tsetse fly; and fundamentally he was as fond of horses as of most animals. But many years ago out in Ceylon when he was still a

soldier, and to boot a soldier with a fine future before him, his wife had said to him as she rode beside him one morning that he looked like a chimpanzee on horseback.

"Do I?"

"You don't ride badly," she said, "but you just look awful on a horse."

"I see."

He was hurt but he refused to show it. Not long after that he gave up riding, a little later she went away, and he resigned his commission.

The dogs were after a rabbit. The basset hound stayed behind. That fat creature was not void of wisdom. Rabbits were faster than he and wisdom is the enemy of ambition. McKenna turned to the right. Here was a world of doves and perroquets and in the distance a hammer and anvil bird swung on to a branch. He reached the ridge and the gay world of birds left him. The swamp was behind him. He mounted the stoney ridge which was at the mercy of the sun. He was a good climber and soon he reached the top and there extended before him a vast arid plain that seemed to spread to the foot of the Aberdares. The plain was yellow as it befits January. On the right was the Waces' house; to the left thorn trees like undersized tired soldiers appeared to march along the plain. It had been both his and Miles's sorrow that their houses were on the top of bleak ridges. How much pleasanter it would have been to live down there near the furrow, with trees and shade and green grass. But the furrow was near to the swamp and mosquitoes would have made life unbearable and dangerous. Nonetheless it was easy to catch malaria on the ridge, too. Only less certain and less annoying. There was a sense of decay about Miles's house. McKenna had never cared for it but as it wasn't his business to mention that to Miles, he didn't mention it. It was built of cedar and the Indian fundi who had built it must have been a man of pessimistic views. That pessimism was evident in the somewhat ramshackle appearance, and the verandah that ran from end to end seemed to have no connection with the house. A native in a dirty kansaw was lolling outside the verandah.

The kansaw was not only dirty but it was torn in patches. McKenna would not have tolerated the dirt and slovenliness. But, of course, Gloria had a different outlook on the matter. Her house boys wore shiny white kansaws with red sashes round their waists. They looked like stewards of a hotel or a club. That, however, was the sort of thing that appealed to Gloria. The cook and the kitchen boy and the gardener could walk about filthy and in rags. That did not interfere with her pleasure in the spruce appearance of the house boys. Some

day, she hoped, she would go home for a short visit to England. How her friends would admire the two black, sashed servants she intended to take with her! Their presence would give distinction to her native Kensington. But Miles could not rake up the money for the passage home and thus Kensington remained drab and monotonous.

They had two Somali ponies. (Gloria and Miles maintained that they were country bred: McKenna knew better.) The syce, needless to add, was as gorgeous an apparition as the house boys. McKenna hailed the dirty boy and said he would go indoors and he wished to see the head boy. As he entered the house he thought of the saying that you can judge the white man by his coloured servants. He left it at that and opened the door that led into the sitting-room.

There was a mirror above the fire-place. In London Gloria had been brought up in a house where there was an ugly belly-like Victorian mirror over every mantelpiece. It had cost her a certain amount of money to have one of the mirrors of her childhood shipped to Kenya. On account of the light that came in through the open door the mirror reflected McKenna's figure, his blue shirt and white corduroy shorts. You would have thought on first looking into that mirror that a young man of about seventeen had come into the room. The verandah being too wide the sitting-room was in perpetual gloom. Gloria had been unable to make up her mind whether she was a sports-woman or a thoughtful lover of exotic art. Though she was neither she believed that she had found a compromise. The sitting-room reflected it well. There were Japanese daggers hanging on one wall and a collection of riding-whips and hunting-crops dangling on the other. On a battered tallboy of no period stood her photograph in a Mappin & Webb silver frame. Gloria at the age of twenty in an evening frock: and she was as lovely as you expect a rose to be. There was a writing-desk in a corner. Inlaid Dutch of the Great Exhibition era. Kenya in those days was still the dark primeval home of cannibals, slave traders and wild nature. But the writing-desk did not seem to appreciate that.

On that writing-desk in a silver frame was Miles's picture. There were two arm-chairs and a settee and in deference to what is called local colour, Somali shawls were on them, green and red and very attractive in Gloria's eyes. A good water-buck head was mouldering above the door. McKenna lit a cigarette. The bassët hound sighed. The other dogs had stayed outside but the obese little hound had an uncanny gift of worming his way unnoticed into any room his master entered. Gloria had a dachshund and Miles a half-bred, trembling pointer; but they weren't about. They were left with Betty Newton before husband and wife had set out for Nairobi.

McKenna strolled over to Miles's photograph. He was as yet a thin young man on that photograph. Thin and young and keen, the sort of person that would never get fat and would never die. On the photograph he was utterly part and parcel of the living world and that was now so grotesque, empty and heart-breaking. He was wearing his school tie in the picture, a pullover and a tweed jacket. His left hand was in the foreground and it was a fine sensitive hand. That hand had often patted McKenna's shoulder and the voice that used to emerge from that smiling mouth would say with real affection, "David, you're such an old martinet."

McKenna blew a lot of smoke. In the fuggy room (the windows had not been opened for days) the smoke rose like incense towards the photograph of the eternally young Miles. He turned round. The chief house-boy had come in. He was a Kikuyu and he was a youth with a bulging paunch.

"Jambo Bwana," he said.

Very slowly, picking every word with care, he told the boy of his master's death. The boy rolled his eyes, opened his mouth, licked his lips, and then rolled his eyes again. McKenna wished he knew Swahili better, but on the other hand the boy knew even less of that foreign tongue. The boy did not speak. He clasped his hands over his paunch and waited for McKenna to help him out of the difficult situation. McKenna said that the Memsahib had had a son. That was good news and the boy unclasped his hands and showed his fine teeth and began to speak hurriedly, excitedly. Many Kikuyu words crept in and they were wasted on McKenna. When he reached the end of his congratulatory speech, he asked if the Memsahib would be soon back.

"In a few weeks," McKenna said.

The boy said that was a long time. Nevertheless he was now cheerful and as he jabbered on McKenna had to admit that the boy preferred his living mistress to the dead master. Because of Miles he felt sorry about that. He asked the boy if everything was in order on the farm. As far as the boy was concerned nothing untoward had taken place, but they were short of posho. Before he had left Miles promised to be back soon and attend to the posho question. Posho, alias mealy meal, is the staple food of the East African native. McKenna promised that he would stop that evening at the stores in the township and order posho for them.

"Send the cart in to-morrow to fetch it. What about the cattle?"

The boy thought the cattle were well. There weren't many cattle on the farm. About eighty head; and a miscellaneous assortment at that. He had often wondered how Miles made a living out of his

farm; but as Miles did not tell him it was far easier not to ask. He left the boy, called the basset hound and they went out into the dust. A few scraggy chickens were abroad. Two years ago Gloria had suddenly decided to become a poultry farmer. She bought pedigree cockerels and hens and an incubator, and she borrowed McKenna's carpenter, and coops and runs were built and mesh wire lay about for weeks. But after a year or so her enthusiasm waned. Nowadays only a few stragglers of a once hopeful cohort searched for food in the red dust.

There was, however, a lawn in front of the house into which Gloria had put unrelenting energy and work. It was a symbol of endurance and guts. The water-car had to go several times a day to the furrow to bring water and if there was a drought and the furrow was dry, then down to the swamp. But the lawn prospered. McKenna thought she deserved that. He did not go home. He walked along the plain and then he mounted towards the back of his farm. He went through the valley in which his squatters lived. Goats and sheep were everywhere. A procession of native women passed him. They were on their way to the maize shamba to work for their men. Their small children sitting in kind of sacks on their backs looked as though they had grown out of their mothers' shoulders. On the other side of the valley the ground rose and now the grass was not so dry and the stones had disappeared. Above was a huge dark circle. It was the cedar forest. McKenna approached the boundary of his farm. He had already walked about eight miles but that was not much for him. He stopped. He sniffed and the pungent smell of either leopard or lion came to him in waves. Something must have slept there last night, or the night before. Those untamed smells linger on for days. The dogs were chasing scents and smells and he continued on his climb.

Near the boundary there was a hill. On top of that hill stood three umbrella thorns.

"I used to call them the Trinity," the previous owner of the farm had told him the day he took him round. The tree in the middle was the largest of the three. The other two, huge though not so huge, stood at a respectful distance. It seemed to McKenna that neither the imagination nor the knowledge of the previous owner could be commended for having called the trees the Trinity. For those three trees with the large majestic one in the centre were much more like the Crucifixion. He had not been educated in vain at Loretto. He looked up and stopped and he was lost to the world that consisted of the sun, some light clouds and the cedar belt higher up. He sat down under the large tree.

It would have been impossible for him either to define or to try to explain the emotions that umbrella thorn gave him. And even if he had had the capacity to do so he would never have been able to find the appropriate words. To find words for it would have been like making a cheap joke. Under that tree he had nothing to fear. No remorse, no jealousy and no time. It was as though he were not of the world and yet not having to bother with elsewhere. Anyway, it did not occur to him to ask himself why he came so often to that tree. The basset hound lay down beside him and fell asleep.

One's earthly eternity is limited. One is told of birth, but that, so to speak, is knowledge and experience gained at second hand. There is just darkness and out of that darkness begin to rise spots of light and one is not completely sure about them being there. Perhaps they are only somebody else's memories imparted to the growing child. Before the age of four little matters, and when a child of three dies it is doubtful if its immortal soul would care to recollect its earthly adventures and impressions. When a baby cries the parent hears it. Looking back on early childhood one does not hear it, though the parent might still recollect it.

McKenna's father had been the progenitor of eight children. Five of them died at an early age and three grew up; and it had shocked the eight year old David when his father had remarked to a friend that if he came to think of it he was not sure which of them had died and which of them were alive. The father, of course, had said that as a joke. As a matter of fact he liked that type of joke. But the small boy was shocked and worried. Supposing, he often thought, that he was dead and one of his dead brothers were lying now instead of him in his bed? Here, under the umbrella thorn, he sympathized with those fears of thirty years ago. It is a grave mistake to say such things in front of children. But his father, if he were alive, would point out that notwithstanding his fears the boy grew up. That was no excuse. He lit a cigarette, patted the basset hound, and lay back again. No; that was no excuse.

His father was a large good-looking man. He had a mane of black hair and darkish blue eyes which he could use to advantage. He was a distant cousin of a baronet with large estates in the Highlands and he fancied himself as the descendant of a Highland laird. He looked as if he smelt of heather and crofter's whisky. Incidentally he was a civil servant in Edinburgh. A lazy civil servant and what he liked best were big bouts of idleness. They lived in an old house with wide rooms that were cold and draughty in winter. The father was a Roman Catholic and though he wasn't keen on religion he made a point of bringing up his children as strict Catholics. The mother

was a sweet woman. Unfortunately she adored her husband so whole-heartedly and with such purpose that there wasn't much love left for her children. Moreover, they had disappointed her. At any rate five of them, and bitter experience forbade her to trust the remaining three. She had a rich old mother who lived with them and the entire family feared her. Meanwhile, the wind blew through the house and little David woke up in the mornings wishing that it were evening. It was far better under the eiderdown.

Nowadays, he thought, putting out his cigarette carefully, he had all the heat he wanted. Most of his adult life he had had heat. Woolwich was still cold but then there came India and then Ceylon with an interval in the Sudan; eventually Kenya. If, he mused, it had not been so cold in that house in Edinburgh, he might not have come to Kenya after leaving the army. Leaving the army! He remembered a man who had finished his seven years and told him, the young lieutenant, that he was leaving. He was smug about it. His voice implied that that was the best thing he'd ever done. The lieutenant was shocked. "You're not leaving the Sappers," he snapped. "The Sappers are leaving you."

That was a cliché and he must have looked a pompous young fool when he said that. To-day he could afford to laugh at that. But only at the tone; for he himself often felt that the army had left him. He felt that acutely but not up here. Here it seemed far away, you could touch it if you stretched out a long arm. He had no intention of doing so. His thoughts reverted to his father from whose loins his earthly eternity had sprung. It was a blurred picture. His father was a man of moods. He sulked a lot. At times he became the romping boyish parent. He would organize games and make his children play with him. Once he put on his mother-in-law's hat, a vast affair with black feathers, and came prancing into the nursery. His son David blushed and was deeply ashamed of his father.

"You weren't a good son to me," his father said a year before his death. "You're an ungrateful fellow."

That was not true. He was grateful to his father for having forced him at an early age to train himself in self-restraint and self-discipline.

The retrievers arrived, hot and panting. They lay down, the dog fell asleep in utter exhaustion, but in a little while the bitch sat up and started to detick him. Was not life something far more colourful than discipline and restraint? Life should expand, life should embrace itself. One should dance and not march to attention, especially when one did not march against an enemy, though usually one marched against oneself. Seven years ago he had travelled through Spain and saw the carnival at Seville. Life should be a carnival. But if one

had not the guts to dance in the streets, or to be candid, anywhere else ?

Very soon he would have to return to the house, but not yet. That night in Seville he became drunk. He did not dance and did not wear the costume of a pierrot: he only got drunk and next morning he went to the cathedral and heard Mass and he was drunk again that night. The following morning he left the town. The carnival was still in full swing. That was a few months after the divorce. He was no longer a soldier and he had sinned against the Church because of the divorce. But the divorce was the last favour his self-discipline laid at the feet of his late wife.

His thoughts drifted away from his childhood and from himself and fastened on to the memory of Miles, and here under the tree he could easily have shed a tear for Miles who had liked him, who had been weak and good. Poor Miles. He wanted so much to have a son. Now he had the son and it was just the same as if he had not had it. No, that was the wrong way of looking at it. He had experienced pleasure and pride, and since both of them were short-lived, their intensity must have been immense. How clever and understanding he was up here. He smiled, but the smile was short because there was Miles's child that was now an orphan. He saw the child clearly. Something ought to be done about that child. Gloria, at any rate, would make a good mother. That lawn proved it. She would devote the same energy to the child and they would sell out and go to England, and he, the godfather, would send presents on every birthday and perhaps in years to come write letters teeming with good advice and occasionally a cheque would be enclosed. He would come up here and think the letters out carefully.

He was a conscientious man, for he lacked elasticity. He threw up his career because of that lack. It was time to go. He rose and walked down to the house. It was a bit cooler.

(VII)

He drove along the road to the township of Kampi ya Marwa. The dust was whiter as the sun was finishing his daily round. A herd of oryx were near the road. He eyed them with interest. They seldom came to that part of the world. Further on he saw a herd of zebra. The land there belonged to a South African Dutchman. If he shot one of the zebra, the Dutchman might accuse him of poaching. To-morrow, or probably earlier, the zebra would be on his farm. The basset hound sat beside him. The road twisted, then it was straight again and set in dust the township appeared.

The only decent buildings were the District Commissioner's house

and the office facing it. There were three Indian ducas and one stores which belonged to a white man. The mules of the Askari grazed in front of the District Commissioner's office. The flagpole stood aloof surrounded by a small lawn. He stopped the car outside the stores. Brignell the shopkeeper was a real old-timer. He was about sixty-five and had lived in the Congo and in Nyasaland and remembered the Masai war in German East Africa. After the fourth whisky he was ready to relate that in 1906 he was a prisoner of the pygmies, and if you stood him another he said that during his captivity he had eaten of human flesh which tasted of tough mediocre pork.

"How are you keeping, McKenna?" he asked.

McKenna replied that he was well and gave him his shopping list.

"I am getting old," chatted Brignell as he was taking down tins and boxes. "You know how it is. First it comes slowly, then it comes with a bloody rush. But you're all right. Wait another thirty years and then you'll know for yourself. Got your boy here?"

"No."

"I'll tell one of my shenzies to put these things in the car. Anything else?"

"No, thank you. By the way the Wace's cart will come down to-morrow for eight sacks of posho."

"Really?" Brignell said. He didn't say that pleasantly. "Are you the new manager?"

"No, but poor Miles Wace died last Sunday."

"The poor lad." He took his pipe off the counter and put it into his mouth. "I heard of it."

"How?"

Brignell shrugged his shoulders. "The old tom-tom." He took out his pipe. "The post office Babu came in yesterday." He smiled, then winked.

"Mrs. Wace had a baby the same day. A sad business."

"Very. Look here McKenna I can't let her have that posho." Brignell was a large man and he wore a not too clean white shirt and a dirty pair of white linen trousers. All that white of sorts emphasized his size. A native came in and he told him to take the stuff to McKenna's car.

"Why not?" McKenna asked.

"If you want me to be frank I'll be frank and that's that. Poor Miles owes me a lot of money. I told him last week that he either pays up or I won't let him have anything else. Well, now he's dead. I'm sorry about that. But I'm a poor shopkeeper who has to compete with the far too clever Indian. I can't afford to make presents of my

goods. And between you and me his passing over doesn't improve his financial position. I've never seen a dead man pay a bill yet."

He made a deep sucking noise and then remembered his pipe, picked it up and put it in into his mouth.

"Put that posho on my account," said McKenna.

"As you like. I'm not forcing your hand. Come in and have a drink before you go on."

"I'm in a hurry."

"Now don't cut up rough."

"Nothing of the sort. I'm really in a hurry. Thanks all the same."

He went out and drove to the District Commissioner's office. The Goanese clerk informed him that the D.C. had left. He drove to his house. Only his wife was in. She was a nice young woman, seven months gone, and she was the mother of twins. She came to the door.

"I'm so sorry Major McKenna but my husband is at the club. Playing tennis. Are you going down there?"

"Not to-night."

"Is it urgent?"

"It can wait till to-morrow."

"I hear that poor Mr. Wace died. What a shame. Poor Mrs. Wace. I'm so frightfully sorry for her."

"A great shame."

She wanted to go on talking of the dead and the left behind. McKenna, however, said he was in a hurry, smiled at her, waved, got into his car and drove off. A little dejected the D.C.'s wife remained for some time in the doorway.

He took the other road leading out of the township. He passed the local club and there were a few cars outside the club building and four white figures moved vigorously about on the tennis court. For a moment he wondered whether he should look in, but by then the car had solved the problem by leaving the club behind. The course of the car was set for Adams's farm and that farm was twelve miles away. The road mounted and it was fresher and the sun was nearly at the bottom of the horizon. Cedars appeared and they were on both sides of the road and in front of him the trees seemed to meet. A wart hog family trotted across the road and they were in no hurry. The sun went down.

The cedars turned lilac and blue and there was the smell and freshness of resurrection and deliverance in the air. As he reached the plateau the trees fell off on each side but remained an impregnable wall further on. The car bounced over a rickety bridge and four buffaloes emerged from the forest and for a few minutes they lolloped

parallel with the car; then the forest engulfed them a second time. The night opened its greedy mouth and swallowed the little daylight that was left. A tremor shook the forest, as though the night had belched with satisfaction.

Adams's farm was on the other end of the plateau, his house was built near the forest. Two cars stood outside the house. Both were old and in the last throes of decay. One of the cars belonged to Adams, the other to Major Laborde. There was not much to choose between them. The house was small and built of cedar logs. There were a couple of outhouses, one of them without a roof. Part of the thatch hung in mid-air like a veil a widow had lost.

A large fire was roaring in the room which served as sitting-room, dining-room and study. The fire roared because a toto was blowing the bellows and neither Adams nor Laborde bothered to tell him that the fire needed no more blowing. On a table beside a whisky bottle stood a smoking hurricane lamp.

"McKenna," said Adams, "come in. It's good to see you. So you're back."

He did not get up but with his boot pushed a chair forward.

"Here's the prodigal calf, I mean the prodigal son," said Laborde and sniggered.

"Why prodigal?" McKenna asked.

"I wouldn't ask if I were you," said Laborde and laughed loudly.

"So you brought the tripehound along?" He laughed again.

"What's that damned toto doing?" Adams asked. He stared at the black boy. "Stop that," he shouted in Swahili. "You can go." The toto went.

"Why the hell," Adams asked, turning to Laborde, "didn't you tell that toto to get out? Do you want the house set on fire?"

"It's your house and you should have told the toto."

"I couldn't tell him, I was thinking."

He said that in an important voice, then he smiled at McKenna and it was a tender smile which didn't suit his thin nondescript face. He was about forty-five and they called him in the district Dirty Adams. He lived up to that nickname. He wore torn, dirty garments and shaved but rarely. He hardly ever left his farm and if you wanted to see him you had to go to him. But practically nobody wanted to see him. That suited him. He had a few head of cattle and did not look after them. He spent his days reading and he could read even when he was dead drunk. "That just shows," Laborde would say, though he was not certain what it showed.

Laborde was a different proposition. He had been a regular army officer and had served without much distinction in a Gurkha regiment.

Soldiering was not his vocation. He was convinced that he was a man without a vocation. He was short, fat and flabby and sported a white moustache. It was a shapely moustache. He was over sixty and years of malaria had succeeded in making him look like an obese mummy; and mummies are ageless. He was one of the first settlers in the district. He came soon after the war. In the beginning he was an active busy man. He took a lion's share in the founding of the local club and of the farmers' association. He had been chairman and secretary of those institutions on and off for seven years. Then he started to quarrel. He quarrelled with most people and made no distinctions, and you would have believed that he went out of his way to make enemies. Yet at the same time he complained bitterly that he was not popular.

Then suddenly he snapped his fingers at the entire district and retired to his farm and resigned from the club and the association. When he went shopping he went in through Brignell's back door. Nowadays it was said in the district that after all old Laborde was not such a bad chap.

He and McKenna were great friends. Because McKenna liked Adams he had recently taken up Adams too, and he did not know whether he enjoyed his company or hated it. But for McKenna's sake and because Adams did not live far from him he saw a lot of him. At times he borrowed books from him. Adams hated lending books.

Adams had never been a member of clubs or associations. He had come unobtrusively into the district, bought his farm from a Dutchman, sat down on the farm, and his relations with the outside world consisted of parcels and parcels of books that would arrive from the Times Book Club. He had an intelligent house boy who did most of his shopping. Whisky was item number one on his shopping list. They said in the district that he was potty. He was the son of a bishop. McKenna was convinced that there was something fine and romantic in him, though he was the first to admit that reading seemed to do more harm than good to him. But at times he could talk well and it was a pleasure to listen to him.

"Well," he asked, "how's Nairobi? Have you been to fêtes and parties, and did you see the Governor?"

"I didn't go to fêtes and parties," said McKenna.

"I hate Nairobi," said Laborde.

"The other day," Adams said, "I read an interesting book on East Africa and Nairobi was mentioned in it. I almost wanted to go and see it."

"But you know Nairobi?" Laborde asked.

"The Nairobi I know is a conglomeration of dusty streets and

pale faced shopkeepers. The one in the book was exciting. I was referring to the latter."

Laborde made a small deprecatory gesture. "Gloria Wace had her baby?" he asked.

McKenna told them of the happenings of the Sunday before.

"He came here once," Adams said. "I didn't think much of him."

"He wasn't a bad sort," Laborde said. "You liked him, didn't you, David?"

"I was very fond of him."

"Whenever I went round to him," said Laborde turning to Adams, "he was always there. Mind you, I have nothing to say against him. He hadn't a penny to his name." He helped himself to whisky. His hand trembled. "I'm shaking with fever again," he said. He was smoking one cigarette after the other; Adams had a pipe in his mouth.

"How do you know that?" McKenna asked.

"How do I know what?"

"How do you know that Miles was broke? I didn't know it."

He was not going to tell them about the posho incident. He turned the wick lower but the lamp continued to smoke.

"Everybody knew that," Laborde said. "I know why he liked you so much. He wanted to borrow money from you. Every day he came round to your house resolved to touch you. But you're so prim and so dapper and so well groomed that the courage failed him every time. I think that's extremely funny."

Adams was not listening, McKenna was hurt: terribly hurt.

"I don't believe a word of it," he said. "Miles knew that I'd have helped him."

"You were lucky that you didn't get mixed up with him. Of course," Laborde sniggered, "you're a rich man. A few thousand pounds don't mean a lot to you. I'm poor, I've always been poor, so you must forgive me for talking the way I did." His little eyes danced with glee.

"Stop drivelling," McKenna said.

Adams yawned. He was bored.

"Of course there is Gloria and the baby," Laborde said.

"Yes," McKenna said thoughtfully, "the baby."

"Keep clear of them," Laborde said. "One has enough with one's own troubles."

"I promised Miles that I'd be the child's godfather. It's my duty to keep that promise."

"A strong man is a man who has his conscience under control," Laborde said.

"In that case I'm not a strong man," McKenna said.

"There is only one sort of strength in this world," Adams said suddenly. "To keep away from the world. From the day you are born the world wants to drag you into its midst. If you keep away from it you defeat the world."

"But who wants to defeat the world?" Laborde asked. He sat back, wiped his forehead which glistened with feverish perspiration, and he settled down to enjoy himself by contradicting Adams. Adams waved the interruption aside.

"Look at me," he went on, "I'm out of the world, yet I can take from it whatever I want."

"You rob the world," Laborde laughed.

"What do you think of that?" Adams asked turning to McKenna. It was getting cold in the smoky room. There were large cracks in the wall and the cold of the night walked in and walked out as it pleased.

"As a matter of fact," McKenna said, "I was thinking of Miles's debts. Have you any idea, Michael," he said to Laborde, "how much he owed?"

"Haven't the faintest idea. Give Gloria a cheque for a hundred pounds. That's more than she ever got from Miles."

"You can't write out a cheque and then walk away," McKenna said.

"Then give her a hundred and twenty." He returned to Adams. "I agree with you, but only up to a point. One must keep out of the world. To keep out of it means to be an individualist, in short a man of character. May I help myself?" He took the half empty bottle and poured out three drinks. "But in a sense one can't stop oneself from giving."

"What the dickens do you mean?" Adams asked.

"Well, take you and me. We live away from the world and far from the world. Nevertheless we give a certain amount to the world."

"That's the first time I ever heard of that," McKenna said. They did not hear him. Adams was listening and his eyes were like the eyes of a cat before falling asleep.

"This is a new country," Laborde continued. "Even though we don't admit it, we have contributed our share to the pioneering."

"That's a curious view," Adams said. "This isn't a new country. This is a very old country. Just poke your head out through the window and you'll have to agree with me. This is a very old country."

Laborde sighed. The discussion was not going his way. He liked to work out arguments in the long afternoons during which he had nothing whatever to do. Unfortunately those arguments sounded

less convincing when put into words. He had the urgent desire to tell Adams that he would give up speaking right now till the end of his life. He sighed again and plodded on.

"I grant you that," he said. He raised his voice. "I grant you that, but old or not old we white people have opened up this country. It would have slept on without us for another thousand years. You and I, my dear fellow, have contributed willy-nilly to the awakening of this part of Africa." Perhaps, after all, he would not give up speaking.

"The fact is," McKenna said, "that one can never really sit back."

"Exactly," Laborde said and looked gratefully at McKenna. "You people always try to make yourselves more important by ascribing your puny actions to a fine thought or great idea," Adams said. "I for one am not a hypocrite. I am here because European life is too fast and too stupid for my liking."

"But you still contribute your share," Laborde said.

"I am willing to make anybody a present of my share," Adams said. He was getting drunk. "Open up the country! My foot! I'm not going to call myself a fine fellow till I have proved it in my own eyes. But I don't think such a chance will ever come my way. Or yours, Laborde." He stood up, stretched himself and sat down again. The fire that had been so splendid half an hour ago was slowly dying. "I am reading a very good book," said Adams forgetting the argument. "It's a life of Campbell-Bannerman. He was a much greater man than most people would think."

"I don't care a damn," Laborde said.

"What did you say?" Adams asked. There was anger in his eyes.

"I said that I envy your patience. How many books do you read a week?"

"I read a book a day."

"But what happens if one has only two hundred pages and the other five hundred pages?"

"If a book has five hundred pages I sit up the whole night reading it. Stop asking daft questions."

It was always like that. All of a sudden drink descended on him and enveloped him and there was only quarrelsomeness left. McKenna had noticed that it was not so much the quantity of drink as the hour. After eight in the evening Adams wanted to be alone and then he hated other people. McKenna was the exception.

"Books are important," Adams went on and the volume of his voice seemed to collect the smoke and the draught. "It is very well for a half wit like you Laborde and a well-read man like me to argue

and talk. But these are only two opinions: yours and mine. In a book you often find as many as ten opinions. And the eleventh opinion is the reader's when he argues with the author."

Laborde felt like telling him that he spoke like an illiterate who at long last had discovered the printed word. That, however, would have caused a row and would have put an end to his habit of going round to Adams twice a week. You can't, he thought, pick and choose in the back o' beyond, so he said suavely, "I think we'd better leave you to your books."

"Good night, McKenna," said Adams. "Tell the boy I don't want food."

"See you the day after to-morrow," Laborde said against his inclinations.

"Good night Adams," said McKenna and they went out into the night. The stars were haughty and distant. Orion was almost above their heads.

"He got drunk quickly to-night," Laborde said. "But of course it's difficult to keep up an average." He giggled.

"I don't believe he gets drunk," McKenna said.

"Your trouble is that you give everybody the benefit of the doubt," said Laborde with real affection.

"Come and dine with me Michael," McKenna said.

"Haven't enough petrol in the tank."

"Come in my car. I'll drive you back in the morning. I must see the D.C. after breakfast."

"That's excellent," said Laborde and metaphorically put out his tongue at the loneliness that waited for him in his house. They drove away and the basset hound sat between them. They drove in silence for some time and then Laborde exclaimed, "Look, an ant-bear."

They drove on and then Laborde said, "I'm sure that Adams is mad."

"A few minutes ago you said he was a drunk."

"Both. But I like the idea of the drunkard with a book before him. Can you see him sitting with a book before him and the words dance and they make little sense and next day he tells you that he has read an excellent book on the irrigation of the White Nile."

"You're wrong. He remembers everything he reads and it all gets into him and stays there. Mind you, I don't guarantee that he digests all of it. But probably that's an advantage."

Laborde played with the dog's ears for a while and then he said, "Have you ever been to the Rajput?"

"No."

"I saw a mad peasant there. As mad as a hatter. Adams reminds me of that peasant. That peasant ended up by killing his wife."

"Adams hasn't a wife."

Laborde laughed. "I'm not uncharitable," he said. "In a way I like him. I'm even sorry for him. You see, I retired from life after forty years of jolly good living, but he retired the day he was born." He laughed out loud, and as he listened to his own laughter he wondered whether he had had too much whisky.

They arrived at McKenna's farm and Ali came with a lamp and when they went into the sitting-room with the large easy chairs, and the fire burning sedately and electric bulbs shedding their clean light, Laborde said with approval, "Every time I come here I feel that I should be wearing a dinner jacket."

"The drinks are there," said McKenna pointing at a table.

Ali came in and announced that the bath was ready.

"Will you have the first bath?" McKenna asked.

"All right," said Laborde.

He took his little case which contained his dressing-gown and slippers and shaving tackle and went off to the bathroom. He carried that case with him whenever he left his farm. One or the other of his friends might meet him and ask him to spend the night with them.

The basset hound was having his dinner. He ate wolfishly and when he had finished he remained for a few minutes beside his plate. That was a habit of his and he could not have explained it. The hyænas were noisy. The other dogs were chasing about the compound barking at the hyænas. The basset hound watched them for a while, then wagged his tail, then slowly went to the dining-room. McKenna and Laborde were dining. Laborde wore a time-worn dressing-gown of faded red; McKenna looked perhaps even slimmer in his dark blue dressing-gown. The basset hound sat down beside McKenna. Ali was as good a butler as a valet.

"Sir," he said, "the dog she in way."

"He isn't in the way."

Ali resigned himself to the basset hound's presence.

"This is damned good wine," Laborde said. "But you sappers always like the best of everything." He looked round the dining-room. "A nice room, a nice dinner and good service. You're a lucky man, David."

"I wonder."

"Don't wonder. Take me. I never had enough of anything. I never could afford to relax. That's why I didn't get on in life. It wasn't bad but it wasn't good enough. Then I came to this country.

I made a mess of farming. Of course I'm not too keen on farming. You simply dote on it."

"I don't like farming," McKenna said.

"Did you say you didn't like farming?"

"No, I don't."

"Then what do you like?"

"Soldiering."

"But man, you left the army because you wanted to."

"Quite, but that doesn't mean that I enjoyed leaving the army; and it doesn't mean that I like farming."

"Then why do you farm?"

"I left the army, I went back to England and I didn't know what to do with myself. Then somebody said try Kenya. I tried it. I realized I wouldn't be a bad farmer. Once I started to farm I began to learn the job. It's a very commonplace story."

"I wish you told me why you chucked your career."

"On personal grounds."

"If you don't want to tell me you needn't. I chucked the army because I wasn't a keen soldier and because I thought I'd be happier out of it. I wasn't. It's much of a muchness. Mind you I was thirty years in the Indian army. Incidentally I'm going to shave off my moustache."

"Why?"

"I'm sick of looking like a retired colonel, especially as I am a retired major."

"You'll look like a bishop without it."

"And have a son like Adams." He laughed. Before they went to bed he asked, "What are you going to do about Gloria and her child?"

"I'm asking myself that."

"Look here, David, keep well out of it. Please let me give you a piece of advice. I know how you feel." He knew he did not but it sounded more convincing like that. "Give Gloria some money. That'll ease your conscience. Persuade her to go back to England, and then we'll all be happy and we'll go round to Adams twice a week and watch him getting drunk at eight."

"You talk as though I were embarking on a terrible adventure."

"Once you take other people's troubles on your shoulder, you don't know where they'll lead you." The fever was on him and it began to loosen the control of his thoughts. "Fancy you don't like farming and yet you make a success of it."

He thanked McKenna for the dinner and took himself to bed. He got into bed and pulled three blankets up to his chin. He saw the

terrier sitting under the washstand, but he was not sure, so he left it at that. It had happened one night when fever had come on him suddenly, he thought he saw a spitting cobra not far from his bed. He put the vision down to fever, and next morning his house boy entered the room in order to wake him. The snake spat into the boy's face. He was lucky that the snake had missed his eyes. Now Laborde put out his hand and took a couple of pills of quinine. His hand trembled and it took him some time to get the pills to his mouth. It would have been too hard work to raise the glass of water: so he swallowed them neat and nearly choked.

"David should leave it well alone," he muttered and fell into sleep that rocked him and threw him as if he were in a small boat on an angry pea-green sea.

(VIII)

"I admire those umbrella thorns of yours immensely," said Laborde. They were standing outside the house. McKenna had just come back from the milk shed. Shortly after they got into his car and drove to Adams's farm. They arrived there around ten. Adams was out. McKenna did not mind that: he belonged much more to the evening and the night.

"Probably sitting under a tree and reading a book," Laborde said. He got out and walked to his car. "The next time you'll see me the moustache will be off." Even the shaving off of a moustache might alleviate the monotony of his existence. He waved to McKenna and without rancour envied him for being more self-contained than he. Or perhaps he was not. He waved again and called after him, "Mind your own business and nobody else's."

The District Commissioner was at his office. McKenna discussed with him some not too important matter connected with one of his squatters. The D.C. was a young man full to the brim with hopes and principles one usually begins shedding at the age of thirty-five. He had still four years to go. He was a champion of the native, a believer in Native Paramountcy and slightly resented the presence of the non-official white man. At the same time he wanted his settlers to be a happy little family. He was often disappointed. He admired McKenna, for he instinctively knew that he would never have trouble with him.

"My wife," he said when the business was over, "is going home to have the baby. It's much wiser. It was touch and go with the twins."

"Gloria Wace had no trouble with her baby in Nairobi."

"Poor Wace. What a shock. You were a friend of his, I believe."

McKenna nodded. They were standing at the window. A skeleton of a mongrel was limping along in the sunshine searching for offal. The Union Jack on the flagstaff floated bravely though there was not much breeze. The mongrel disappeared.

"I'm in a difficult position," the D.C. said. "Wace came here ten days ago and promised faithfully to pay his own and his natives' taxes this week. What am I to do? It's very difficult. I'm talking of his last year's taxes. He always talked me into giving him another month's grace. He had the gift of the gab. Now what am I to do about it? Go to his wife? I don't see what else I could do."

"How much is it?"

"I don't know offhand. About sixty pounds. That shouldn't have been difficult to pay. But you know how it is. At times a thousand pounds may mean little, at other times a fiver means life or death." The worldly-wise young man shook his head and looked even more worldly wise.

"If you drop me a chit giving the exact figure, I'll let you have a cheque."

"I think that's very handsome of you. I wish I had such a friend. I'll send a runner out after lunch."

McKenna clearly saw Laborde and could hear Laborde's voice. He shrugged his shoulders.

"I had Laborde staying with me last night," he said conversationally.

"A kindly man," said the D.C., "but difficult. But unfortunately we have a far more difficult man in this district." It occurred to McKenna that the D.C.'s voice had a certain bleating quality.

"Are you referring to Adams?" he asked, and could not resist smiling.

"I am referring to Adams. I wish he'd move elsewhere."

"But why?"

"I can't tell you. But whenever I see him, which, as you can imagine, is only very seldom, I pray that he should leave us. And I don't know why. There's Mrs. Newton." McKenna looked out through the window and there was Betty Newton getting out of her car. "Such a charming woman."

The door swung open and Betty Newton came in. The hinges needed a little time to recover. Her yellow hair was untidy under the large terai. She was not a tidy woman. The main reason of her untidiness was that she did not think much of men. They were fools, or congenital idiots, or both. For her to watch a man was like watching a performing ape. They were unpleasant, dangerous apes and performed clumsily. She humoured them out of a sense

"I wish I was dead," Gloria said, and those words in all probability went to join those million and million similar sentences that had been uttered with the same sincerity since the beginning of the world. "I won't be able to live without him," she went on. "Betty, I'm through with life."

She wiped off her tears, Betty was still sobbing. She understood Gloria's loss. She understood it through Gloria. Miles had been an ape and an unsuccessful ape at that. But owing to Gloria's sorrow he was now fine and great and wonderful.

"Poor sweetie pie," she said. "How is the baby?"

"The baby is well."

"That must be a great comfort to you."

Gloria shook her head.

"What do you mean?" Betty asked.

"Darling, you'll understand me. Whenever I look at that child I feel that Miles had to die that that thing should live. I don't like it. Betty, I hate it." She burst into tears and Betty did not know if she should be shocked. "Of course," Gloria said tearfully, "I can only confess that to you. If I told it to anybody else people would say I was a monster. I'm not a monster but I miss Miles so terribly. I miss him so much."

Her eyes were dry and almost expressionless. Betty decided not be shocked.

"I know how you feel," she said, "but that will pass. Don't shake your head. It will pass. You must look at it like that; you'd be terribly lonely without the child and it's Miles's child. It's a bit of him. That's how you must look at it."

"I can't."

Betty took out her enamel cigarette case and offered Gloria a cigarette. They lit up and Gloria gazed earnestly at the smoke rising towards the white ceiling.

"You needn't worry," she said. "I won't be an inhuman mother. I'll do my duty by the child but I wish it had been the other way round."

Betty thought that it would be preferable to talk of practical matters. "I suppose," she said, "when you leave here and get strong enough you'll sell out and return to England."

"No."

"No?"

"No."

"But why not?"

"Because the only person I could go to is my mother. Betty, I couldn't stand it. Do you know what my mother is like?" Betty intimated that she did not know.

"My mother is nearly seventy. She dyes her hair yellow and she goes about dressed like a girl but wears old-fashioned hats. You know the hats I mean. Almost ostrich feathers. She goes to those genteel pubs in South Kensington and sits about and drinks brandy and gets coy. Then at closing time she goes home and then she's as old as her age. She never sleeps with an open window. She isn't dressed before twelve o'clock. Her whole flat smells of things that frighten me. You see my father was a solicitor. A very successful man. Divorce specialist. We knew a lot of people and he had all the friends in the world. My mother simply can't understand that nobody cares a damn to see an old hag like her. My father died ten years ago. He left my sister and me two hundred and fifty a year. She has spent all her money and she bullied me into giving her a hundred a year, and bullied my sister who has a rich husband to give her two hundred a year. If I went home to her she'd drive me potty and she'd take my last penny and spend it on double brandies."

"Then why don't you go to your sister?"

"Because my sister is four years older than I and she thinks she knows everything better than I. She said that Miles was no good, coming to Kenya was no good, to buy a farm was no good. If I went to her she'd be delighted. She could say day and night, 'I told you so, I told you so.' Betty darling, you can't say to people go here, go there. I have nowhere to go and there are thousands like me. I'll go back to the farm and wait till the bank sells it. And then I'll have really nowhere to go."

"Was Miles very hard up?"

"You know as well as I that he was stony broke. But what did it matter? He was alive and now he is dead."

"Darling, you distress me."

"It's not as bad as that. Miles never had any debts. I still have a hundred and fifty a year. I can sit down and live like the poor white I'm going to be. But I won't leave Kenya. This was Miles's country."

She was exhausted a little but when Betty suggested she should have a nice rest, she said, "No, please stay. I hate to be alone."

They talked for some time and eventually Betty remarked that she was quite certain that David McKenna would stand by her. According to Betty it was the least he could do.

"He bores me to tears," Gloria said.

"He was a sapper," Betty said. "Reggie always says that sappers are such crashing bores. Thank God Reggie was in the 60th."

Her words were wasted on Gloria; for she had no connections with the intricacies of military life. Miles had been one of those lucky people who grow up after one war and die before the next one.

She had had in her unmarried days a certain sort of admiration for Guardees, but the coming of Miles into her life blotted that out. She nodded vaguely.

"He's like an automaton," she said. "He looks like an army tailor's advertisement. But Miles was fond of him. He wanted him to be the child's godfather. Let him be the child's godfather. Besides, there are so few R.C.s about."

"If I were you, duckie, I'd keep on the right side of him."

"I shall. I must admit he's been a good friend to us." She smiled. "Have you ever seen him drunk?"

"No. I wouldn't have dreamt that that paragon of virtue could get drunk. But I'm glad to hear that. He sounds a bit more human."

She did not really mean that. Betty liked her Gin and It in the evening and maybe a John Collins in the morning. But two of each were more than ample. Drunkenness was too masculine for her liking. And drunkenness often bred rowdiness and in a rowdy crowd you could not hear your own voice. Betty was fond of listening to her own voice.

"He wasn't human at all," Gloria said. "It was about a year ago that he came round to dine with us. Miles and he drank a lot but he must have been drinking before. Anyway he was paralytic. He was terrible. He looked like a . . ." Her eyelids went up and down rapidly: she was concentrating hard. "A knight in shining armour who has fallen into a puddle. He was so ashamed of himself. It was simply ghastly. But I must admit he behaved damn well."

The door opened discreetly and there was the night nurse standing in the doorway. Both women looked round and the night nurse gave Betty a mild yet energetic smile, then she shook her head and Betty said dear me it must be late. She kissed Gloria good night and promised to be back next morning. She followed the nurse from the room. The corridor was quiet though a little whimpering came through a glass door.

"Anybody very sick?" Betty asked.

"That's the babies."

"Is Mrs. Wace's baby in there?"

"Yes."

"May I look at it?"

The nurse took her into the nursery. She switched on the night light and the nursery came into being in a half-hearted fashion.

"That's him," the nurse said.

Betty bent over the baby. It was asleep and it was pale and still very old. It had not as yet reached youthfulness.

"How old it looks," she said. She was talking in a whisper and

talking in a whisper irritated her. It reminded her of being in church.

"They do at that age," the nurse said.

"Is it a healthy baby?"

"Quite healthy."

She picked up the baby and Betty examined it carefully. "I never realized," she said, "that they look so frail." The nurse was staring at her absent-mindedly. "I haven't any children," Betty said and hated her whispering voice which made her remark sound like a confession. "I must be going," she said louder. She leaned forward and patted the baby's hand. It was a comparatively long hand. She patted it again and thanked the nurse and went out.

(IX)

There were no clouds in the sky. The afternoon sun was above the three umbrella thorns and the basset hound blinked on account of the light. His master sat a few feet away. He stared at him hard as though he was seeing him for the first time. Then he closed his eyes and plunged into slumber. A lone oryx trotted along the track and stopped, and then trotted on. McKenna was oblivious of the oryx. He took out his cigarette case and forgot to take out a cigarette. He held the case in his hand for a little while and eventually put it back into his pocket.

The trouble, he thought, was the sharp incline of the ridge. He was thinking of laying on running water in his house. Two years ago he had installed electricity. Next year or the end of this year he would start on water. But it was more complicated than he had originally planned. The pumping system he had had in mind would not work. The incline. He must work out a different system. What was the name of that pump that worked like a concertina? He did not remember and that annoyed him. There surely was a way out and he ought to use the motor, which generated electricity, for the pump too. The logical procedure would have been to install electricity and running water at the same time. But that would have been a sign of impatience, hence of moral weakness.

Here in the peace of the umbrella thorn his planning and tabulating seemed ludicrous and pompous. Why could he not have installed the two together, instead of using such commonplace things as pumps and electric light as a moral lever? Now and then he felt that he must be a vile man at heart. Otherwise he would not be so much at pains to keep himself under control. He shrugged his shoulders. His best friends, and there were very few of them, were certain that it was

Loretto and the army. Fundamentally it was neither. He had to learn to control himself at an early age. Or so it appeared to him.

His mother was mild and sweet; his father a man of moods and a spendthrift; and behind them both was his grandmother who was rich. And she held on to her money as she held on to dear life, which was saying a lot, for when McKenna was born she was already seventy-four years old. She was a miser among old women. She lived with her daughter and son-in-law because it was cheap. She did not pay for her keep and the McKennas did not dare to ask her to pay her way. That might spoil their chance of inheriting the old girl's money. The father loathed her but of course never showed it. Her daughter feared her but she concealed her fear under a dutiful daughterly smile. The grandmother, Mrs. Finlay, was the widow of an Edinburgh surgeon who had not been afraid of distance and foreign lands. With the courage of a conquistador he left his native Edinburgh and went to London where he became famous and made money and once operated on a minor royalty, but without the result of being knighted. He died at a comparatively young age and his widow returned to Edinburgh. Her son-in-law had to spend many winter nights listening to her comparing him with her dead husband. The comparison was not flattering. But that was some time before the youngest son was born. The memory of her husband grew dim with her advancing years and one evening the worm decided to turn. McKenna's father made some quite harmless remark about successful medicos being just a lot of quacks. He was not an offensive worm. His remark, however, lifted the curtain of memory and the old woman flew at him. She staged a proper scene and told him and her daughter that she would not leave her money to them. Eventually she fainted. Fainting was a trick of hers. Whenever she had had her say or was cornered by an argument she found refuge in sitting down, closing her eyes and then passing out.

"At any rate," McKenna's father said after they had carried her to her room, "now that she's disinherited us she'll leave us and that is almost better than being left four thousand a year." Mrs. Finlay did not leave them. She stayed on: she glared at them, lost no opportunity to show her dislike of them, but her trunks remained unpacked. David McKenna was two years old when that scene took place. By the time he was four his father became certain that Mrs. Finlay doted on her youngest grandchild. She had no time for her other grandchildren. Their births and deaths left her unmoved. She was far more interested in the spirit lamp on which in the solitude of her bedchamber she brewed herself strong tea and other concoctions. Now all that had changed. She adored little David and the happy

thought came to the father that David could and therefore should save the family finances. He used to carry the small boy upstairs and tell him to knock on the door and ask granny to let him in.

"I don't want to," wailed the boy.

He was afraid of the old woman and did not like her smell. Even at the present moment, with the sun going and the tree so quiet above him, he could smell that smell of age, of wasting and of decay. His father pinched his ear. "Knock," he whispered furiously and went on pinching till the child knocked on the door.

"Och, it's you, my little one," the old woman said, and the father disappeared as he heard her approaching the door. David went in and with downcast eyes and an extremely red ear mumbled that he had come to see Granny. She picked him up (exactly as he feared) and carried him like a baboon would carry its victim. She sat down and said, "Now then, Davy, we will have a party." She gave him tea and it seemed to him that the tea tasted of her. She kept him with her for hours. The other children played, living noise was mounting from the street and David had to go on sitting in her arms and drinking cups and cups of tea. There were days when she was in an ebullient mood and cooked him queer concoctions and made him eat them. "Is Granny a good cook?" she asked, and her dim eyes were brimming over with pride and love.

"Very good," he mumbled, thinking of his father who might be listening at the keyhole. One day it was too much for him. It was a summer day and his sister Louisa and his brother Alastair had been talking of a special picnic they would have in the kitchen: it was the cook's afternoon off. And there he was on that aged lap and instead of a picnic there was a mess that looked like porridge with tomato sauce and he would have to eat it. He wriggled out of the arms and dashed for the door. He opened it. Hurrah, there was nobody on the other side. He ran to his room. He felt safe but in ten minutes' time his ever watchful father arrived and gave him the beating of his life. From that day onward he remained a docile boy in his grandmother's arms.

The grandmother died when he was ten years old. She left her money to him. Not to Mr. and Mrs. McKenna but to him alone. His father never forgave him. He called him a cunning sly traitor. That used to hurt him. It did not hurt him any more. His father had spent the last ten years of his life weighing over twenty stone. A man of that weight cannot hurt you. As regards his grandmother he had to admit that she loved him and he was too young to understand her. He smiled because he thought that he was still too young to understand her. It was past five, and he could not linger any longer there under

the trees. A native was coming down with some sheep and the very existence of a human being outside his thoughts was a further urge to be gone.

"Come on," he said to the basset hound and they went down to the sheds.

The cattle had come in and he stood beside the boma and watched the Lumbwa and the Kikuyu milking the cows. The calves waited impatiently in the boma. A brindle cow came into the shed. She had lost her calf two days ago. She refused to give her milk and the boy tugged at the udder but it was in vain. McKenna watched one of the herds bringing the dead calf's skin and the mother smelt it and licked it and then let herself be milked.

"Bwana," he heard Masai's voice behind him.

McKenna almost jumped. He had been thinking of Miles and the child he had left behind while his eyes were on the cow that was now so happy with the skin of her calf. "What is it, Masai?" he asked.

Masai's eyes were shining and he was carrying McKenna's 303 rifle. "There are zebra on the plain," he said.

"Oh good," McKenna said and did not know why he had said oh good. The retrievers and the terrier were barking and jumping about: they had seen the rifle. McKenna accompanied by Masai and the dogs ran down the stony ridge. It was not easy going and by the time he reached the plain the dogs, with the exception of the basset hound, were racing after the zebra. He put up the three hundred yards sight. There was a large zebra stallion and it had not the slightest intention of moving. It stood in the middle while the other zebra were stampeding around it. The dogs approached and the old zebra stood its ground and if any of the dogs had come near it would have kicked them like ninepins. McKenna raised the rifle. He was an exceedingly good shot both with rifle and shotgun. He fired and the stallion fell; the others decamped and McKenna fired a second time and a young zebra came down. "That will keep them away," he said to Masai whose eyes shone, for he took great pride in his master's marksmanship.

"Perhaps no simba now," Masai said.

The retrievers were sniffing the dead stallion and the terrier was barking at the carcass. McKenna walked back and he found the basset hound sitting sedately outside the house.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," McKenna said and the basset hound wagged his tail as proud as punch. "Your punishment is that I'm going to Nairobi to-night and you must stay here." The basset hound was somewhat puzzled and the tail ceased to wag.

"Sir, Nairobi?" Ali asked with glee. He liked going to Nairobi. In the district he was a lonely son of Madagascar. The club steward was his only compatriot and it was beneath his dignity to associate too much with Kikuyus and such-like people. But in Nairobi there were many of his fellow-countrymen. "Sir, you shoot something? I hear rifle pops."

"Two zebra."

Ali grinned. He also was proud of his master's prowess. They set out around ten. McKenna preferred travelling at night. Besides, it did one a lot of good to keep awake the whole night. Somehow it kept middle age away. They drove in the darkness and Ali sat in the box body and snored but the engine drowned it. Once McKenna stopped the car in order to put on his coat. It was cold in the night. He heard a hyrax. It must be in a tree near by. It sounded like a soul in torment. Funny, he said to himself, that child wailed like that the first time he saw it. He listened carefully to the hyrax and then he let the clutch in and the hyrax's groans and Ali's snores faded out together. He reached Nairobi at six in the morning but did not go to his club. Instead he went to Tor's Hotel and took a room and told Ali to wake him at eight-thirty. It was around ten o'clock when he went to his lawyer, who, he supposed, would know all about Miles's finances. A year ago Miles had asked him to give him the name of a solicitor. He gave him his own solicitor's name. So the lawyer would know. He did not stay with him for long. All the lawyer could tell him was that Miles had died on the verge of bankruptcy and had left three thousand pounds worth of debts. To tell that took him very little time. At the nursing home he first asked to see Doctor O'Brien. Doctor O'Brien kept him waiting for a good twenty minutes, then he came to the waiting-room.

"Oh good morning," the doctor said. "I believe we have met before."

"I came to see you last Sunday about Mrs. Wace. Her husband died the same day the child was born."

"Quite," the doctor said without enthusiasm, "but she found out about it and so I don't think it's worth while to play the watch-dog any longer. By the way, are you a relation or something?"

"I'm no relation. I believe I told you that last time."

"I see so many people."

"Indeed."

I see, said the doctor's eyes, you're trying to be rude. I am being rude, said McKenna's eyes and it was the doctor who first turned his eyes away.

"I seem to remember," he said. "Well, the secretary would like to see you. Second door to the left."

"I'll see him after seeing Mrs. Wace."

"It's not him, it's a lady." The doctor was delighted. "It would be preferable if you saw the secretary first." He opened the door. "Mrs. Barnes!"

Mrs. Barnes, the secretary, came in. She wore glasses and high heeled white shoes. "Yes, doctor," she said.

"This is Mr. . . ." The doctor looked inquiringly at McKenna.

"McKenna," McKenna said imperturbably.

"Oh, yes," Mrs. Barnes said, and her spectacles were focused on her white shoes.

"I think, Mrs. Barnes, that you want to talk to this gentleman. He is, I think, a relation of Mrs. Wace." Doctor O'Brien stalked from the room. It was not a dignified exit, nevertheless he was pleased.

"Mr. McKenna," Mrs. Barnes said, "we should like to receive a cheque in settlement of Mrs. Wace's account. We asked her twice, you know she's been here more than ten days, and we present our accounts weekly and we like them to be paid on the spot. In fact that is one of our rules. Of course we add to the first week's account Doctor O'Brien's professional fees. Mrs. Wace seems to ignore the account. She said that she lost her husband and she'll pay in her own time. That is against our rules."

"How much is the bill?"

"You mean the account?"

"I'm afraid I'm not good at choosing the right word. If you let me have the account I'll give you a cheque provided you don't bother Mrs. Wace next time but send it straight to my solicitors who happen to be her solicitors too."

"I'll be waiting for you. How long will you stay with Mrs. Wace?"

"I really don't know. I'll come to your office when I come out."

She gave her shoes a fond look and left him. As he walked towards Gloria's room he regretted that he had been short with Mrs. Barnes. She was only doing her duty; and Miles's financial position must be known to most people. He would be nice to her on his way out.

"Good morning, Gloria," he said as he came into the room Gloria was wearing a pretty bedjacket. She was expecting him and had enough sense not to put lipstick on her lips. So she looked beautiful but frail, tired and somewhat martyred. The baby was sleeping beside her. It was a moving scene and it was genuine, too, for Gloria never schemed consciously.

"I knew you'd come," she said. "You said it would be Friday, so I was expecting you." McKenna smiled and was searching for

the appropriate answer, when she said, "They're bullying me with the bill. I want you to help me and find out from the bank or somebody where I could get money before Miles's will is proved. I know so little about such things."

"Don't worry about money. How are you? How's the baby?"

He was tongue-tied and wanted to hide behind banalities. The last few days he had been thinking a lot about her. That was on account of Miles's death. In the past he hardly ever gave her a thought. Now there was a sort of intimacy but on his part only. He felt as though he had been watching her through the keyhole.

"My health," Gloria said, "is excellent. Unfortunately nothing can kill me. The child is well, too. David, I'm the most miserable woman in the world."

"Poor Gloria," he said and forgot the keyhole. But he remembered that he should have brought her flowers or fruit or a box of chocolates. It irritated him that he hadn't thought of a suitable present for a visit to a nursing home.

"But you must keep going," he said. "It's lucky you have the baby. It must be a great consolation."

The right words. How easily they came! He came nearer and examined the baby. It was a disappointment. It was asleep and could just as well have been dead. It had no hair and the face was thin and white.

"If one shaved off your moustache and emptied a sack of flour over you," Gloria said, "you'd look like that child." She laughed, and McKenna said, "Come, Gloria, he looks better than that."

"Don't let us exaggerate," she said.

He was angry with himself because her words hurt him. Some people can laugh uproariously when one cracks jokes at them. He envied those people. Not that he had met many of them in his time. He looked up and there were tears streaming down Gloria's cheeks.

"It's nothing," she said. "Nothing at all."

In a little while her tears were under control and he forgot his anger.

"Gloria," he said, "there are a few things I must discuss with you."

"Is it money?"

"I'm afraid it is money. Miles died leaving a lot of debts. But I'm willing to help you for his sake and your sake. . . ." He glanced at the baby so frighteningly in complete repose, ". . . and I suppose for the child's sake."

"He hadn't any debts."

"He had. Quite a lot of them."

"But he never told me."

"Probably he didn't want to worry you."

"People must have cheated him. He was too good."

McKenna left that unanswered. "The fact is," he said, "that we must talk over matters in a rather business-like fashion. What are your plans?"

"I'm not going away from Kenya if that's what you mean." She was hostile. "I don't want anybody to pay my fare to England. I'm not a D.B.S."

"But, Gloria, nobody is thinking of that."

The child woke up and started to cry.

"I'm going back to the farm and I'll see it through," she said. The child was crying louder.

"Does he want something?" he asked, pointing at the child.

"They always cry. I'm going back to the farm and that's that."

"Please don't let him cry like that. Is he in pain?"

Gloria rang the bell and a nurse came in.

"Please nurse," she said with her best smile, "take the baby back to the nursery. We have to discuss important matters and . . ."

There was no need for her to go on. The nurse picked up the child and the child stopped crying and Gloria looked at McKenna. His eyes were very non-committal. She did not like that, so she threw a kiss at the departing baby and when the door had closed she said, "He's sweet, isn't he?"

"Rather frightening because he looks so fragile," McKenna said.

"As I've told you, David, I'm staying. I've heard and read about plenty of women who worked and slaved and paid off their husbands' debts. I can do the same."

"I think you're admirable."

"And I'll do it. In the end I'm no fool and you're my neighbour, and I'm sure you'll give me good advice and I'll pay back every penny and turn the farm into a going concern." She sat up and was prettier than ever.

"It's not so simple," he said, "but if you want to stay then you'll have to stay. But you'll be needing money in the beginning. I've told my solicitors to put a thousand pounds at your disposal."

She did not believe her ears but she believed him. "David, you're far too kind. I'll never be able to pay it back." Her face was crimson with excitement. A thousand pounds was a sum that stretched beyond her dreams of avarice. She never had any money to spare; and that included her whole life from childhood onward. Her father had made a lot of money. They lived on a large scale, but there is a great difference between living well and having money, real big money, at one's disposal. Besides, the living well had belonged exclusively

to her parents. She had only followed in its large wake. "Please give me a cigarette," she said. She was moved. It was unbelievable that if she decided to blue a hundred pounds there would still remain nine hundred. McKenna gave her a cigarette.

"That money should see you through the initial difficulties," McKenna said. "And it should help the baby, too."

"Of course," she said hurriedly, "I'll have to buy such a lot of things for him."

"And you'll have to make some sort of arrangement with Miles's creditors," he said. "But I'll talk that over with the solicitor. The important thing is that you should have no worries and should be able to concentrate on regaining your health and looking after the baby. There is one more thing."

She leaned forward. She had expected there would be a catch to it. There always is a catch.

"As I'm going to be your son's godfather you must let me pay for the nursing home and the doctor's bill. Please."

A lone tear appeared in Gloria's left eye. "You're the kindest man in the world," she said. "You're sweet." She put her hand on his arm and patted it. "Good Lord," she said, "you must be as strong as a bull."

He said nothing. He was not looking at her and she waited for him to speak, and because he remained silent she said quickly, "You don't know how grateful I am."

"It's the least I can do." He stood up. "I must be off. I'll come back in the afternoon. We'll have to make arrangements about the christening."

"Yes," she said. "When was Miles buried?"

"Monday morning."

"Were there many people at the funeral?"

"Yes, there were."

She nodded. That pleased her. As a matter of fact McKenna had only thought of the funeral after he had got back to his farm. Anyway he had telegraphed the club secretary asking him to make the necessary arrangements, and he hoped that at least the club secretary had been present in the cemetery.

He said good-bye to her and as he went along the corridor he found the nursery door open. He peeped in. There was only one cot and he saw that the baby was fast asleep. It was still pale and a fly flew on to its forehead, and much to his surprise McKenna tiptoed to the cot and gently shooed it away. It was the first time he had touched the child. "You poor devil," he said, and reason told him that it was a superfluous remark. Then for a moment he wondered who had

told Gloria of Miles's death; not that it mattered. The baby moved in the cot and he left at once afraid lest he might wake it. But it was funny how smooth, almost uncannily smooth, that child's skin was. He saw on a glass door the notice, "Secretary." He knocked on the door and then entered the office in order to pay for the birth of Miles's son.

(X)

"I have a surprise for you," Laborde said. In an undertone he added, "Though not a pleasant surprise." Then he sniggered.

McKenna was reading *The Times*. *The Times* arrived every week by Air Mail. The Indian Babu at the post office considered that a great luxury. Nobody else in the district received his papers by air. You read the *East African Standard* and once a month kindly relatives collect the papers of last month and make a parcel of them and post them to you. But to read ten days old papers at such a price was foolish. The Babu made no secret of his opinion. He considered himself an educated man and an educated man either reads for reading's sake or for news. A ten days old newspaper was neither. The Babu was a man of comparative wisdom.

"A surprise," Laborde said again.

McKenna put down his paper. Laborde had kept his promise: he had shaved off his moustache. He looked like a benign high churchman and much younger.

"Well," McKenna said, "it is a surprise."

"I wasn't thinking of that," Laborde said. It had been exciting to shave off the moustache and then to run every few minutes to the mirror and have another peep at the naked upper lip. But after twenty-four hours it became a bit of a bore. He began to regret his bold act. After forty-eight hours he settled down to it. "Look who is here. He forced me to bring him along."

Through the open door Adams came in. He was cadaverous in the midday light. His thin shoulders and long legs were like the shadow of one who might be far away or might not exist at all. As McKenna stood up to welcome his rare guest it struck him that there was something clumsily sylvan about Adams. Of the forest, yet the way he moved gave you the impression that he would knock into the next tree. He did not come towards McKenna in a straight line; there were imaginary bushes between them.

"I am very sorry," Adams said, "but my book parcel didn't arrive. I have nothing to read. I thought you might lend me some books."

"You can have all the books I have."

"That's very kind of you." He seemed greatly relieved.

"It's funny seeing him here, isn't it?" Laborde said.

Ali arrived with a tray on which there was a bottle of gin and a bottle of whisky.

"I'll have whisky," Adams said. He drank in a hurry, as if he were afraid that somebody would snatch the drink from him; then he helped himself to another. He looked round. "So this is the style you live in," he said.

"It's jolly nice," Laborde said.

"I suppose it is," Adams said.

"A lion," said McKenna, "came last night and killed two of my heifers."

"That's not too good," Laborde said. "I'll have gin and bitters."

"I'll sit up for the dear fellow to-night," McKenna said.

"I wouldn't," Adams said. He sat down.

"Why not?"

"What is the good of killing one lion? One should either kill all of them, or let them be."

"That," said Laborde, "sounds quite daft to me."

"But," Adams went on, ignoring the remark, "if you killed all the lions there would be so many zebra that it would be the end of white settlement. There wouldn't be any grass left for our beasts. Think. Here we are, the whites, the Indians and the natives hating and squabbling. If we killed all the lions then we should have to withdraw from Kenya and leave the country to the zebra."

"I wonder," McKenna said, "if the home government would grant the zebra self-government."

"That's an important point," laughed Laborde.

"I take the risk," McKenna said, "and I'll sit up for the lion to-night."

"Do you know," Adams said, "that I've been here in Africa eighteen years and haven't shot a living thing excepting guinea fowl and that only for the pot?"

He scratched his neck and Laborde felt that he was going to fill McKenna's house with fleas. "I must say," he said in a loud, insincere voice, "that it is a great pleasure to see old Adams here. I used to think that the only time I'd see him leave his house would be with his feet first."

"I'll outlive the whole lot of you," Adams said.

Ali appeared and announced that luncheon was served.

"So you have a dining-room," Adams said when they seated themselves. "Haven't you a private chapel attached to the house?"

Laborde thought that extremely funny and laughed out loud and

admitted to himself that taking everything into consideration Adams was fun.

"All one needs," Adams went on, "is to be received by a woman in evening dress."

"Talking of women," Laborde said, "how is Gloria Wace?"

"She's very well."

"And the baby?"

"Very well."

"Did you rock it on your knee?"

"Not exactly."

"What is this?" Adams asked.

"Anchovy eggs."

"I don't think I'm going to eat it," Adams said and pushed the plate away.

"It doesn't bite," Laborde said.

"Do you want any wine?" McKenna asked.

"I'll have whisky," Adams said promptly.

"I wouldn't say no to wine," Laborde said.

Ali brought in a bottle of hock and it was not exactly cool.

"Next year," McKenna said, "I'll have a frigidaire. I've ordered one from England."

"You must be a very busy man," Adams said. He gave McKenna a long affectionate look. "You're a fine chap," he said simply. "But," he said, shaking his head, "you must let me go my own way." He drank a little whisky and leaned forward. "I read an exciting book the other day," he said, "it was about various murders."

"You mean you read a thriller," Laborde said.

"No, it was a precise, almost scientific book on murder. It described murders that had actually taken place and analysed them. But it all comes down to this: if one wishes to murder one should decide on dying too."

"Now what do you mean by that?" Laborde asked. "Thank you." That was meant for McKenna who had refilled his glass. "Many murders don't come off," said Adams, "because the fear of being caught hampers the would-be murderer. But if a man should decide that he is ready to die, then there wouldn't be such a thing as an unsuccessful attempt at murder. Take political murders. Bombs are thrown and pistols are fired and they usually miss the quarry. Take the late King Alfonso of Spain. How many attempts were there made on his life? Dozens. Why didn't those attempts succeed? Because the murderer wanted to make his getaway, so he jeopardized efficiency and chiefly accuracy, by which I mean coming at closer range and concentrating only on the murder. Of course

he doesn't escape, but his victim often isn't his victim at all." McKenna watched him while he spoke. It was incredible that a man should be able to be so logical in matters that did not concern him. He neglected his own affairs completely. But did he? And what were his own affairs? Perhaps he took from life what he wanted and because he took no more was no reason to pass judgment on him.

"I never thought of that," Laborde said grudgingly. "I suppose you're right."

"The way I would do it is like this," Adams said, and began to move knives and forks and nearly upset his glass. "I'm standing here at the curb. The king or grand duke or president or whatever he is is going to come round here. Good. I have a revolver in my pocket and a policeman is standing in front of me. There are a couple of plain-clothes men about. But never mind."

"I don't," Laborde said.

"Shut up. The car with the potentate in it is coming. The average fool would take a pot shot and hit the chauffeur or the mud-guard and then would try to make his getaway and the detectives would catch him. But I would wait till the car came level. Then with my left hand, which would hold a knuckle-duster, I'd hit the policeman, jump forward and shoot the man at arm's length. I'd shoot him calmly, and instead of thinking of myself I'd concentrate on killing him. Of course I would be caught but my victim would be dead."

"Very convincing," Laborde said.

"It's not so simple," McKenna said. "Out in India I've seen plenty of that sort of thing happening. Generally speaking it doesn't work."

"Probably," Adams said. "But it could work. You see it isn't as difficult to kill a man as to make up one's mind that one must die, too. I hope to God that if I ever thought that I must rid the world of somebody or other I should have the strength to offer myself up too."

"You're getting morbid," Laborde said and drank more wine. The man is potty, a golden voice sang within him. The colour of that voice was the colour of the hock.

"I've eaten all I want," Adams said and got up. "With your permission I'll go and look at your books."

"Won't you have any coffee?"

"I don't care for it. Thank you for the lunch." As he went out he patted McKenna on the shoulder.

"He's potty and I'm getting drunk," Laborde said heavily.

"I'm glad you like the wine."

"Like it? I love it." He smiled vaguely. "I like it as much as

I like you, David. And because I like you so much I wish to God you'd go and stand in the market place, provided there was a market place here, and shriek the house down. One can't go through life holding on to oneself as if one were a filly ready to bolt." He belched discreetly. "Sorry, I drink hock so seldom. I know you don't mind." The smile returned. It was quite unsure of itself. "But, my boy, I know the army and you know it too. I was a real soldier, which means I was a conscientious footslogger, and I was in India, and I did some fighting in Mesopotamia, and I wanted to get my red tabs and never got them. Ended up as a bloody major and now my pension is commuted and I don't care a damn. Give me some coffee, or I'll fall asleep. Damned good wine that was." He stared at the table, then at McKenna, and wished he knew what he wanted to say. He knew what he had said and he wondered why he had said that. Suddenly it all came back. "Never mind, but for God's sake go and shriek the house down. Give me some coffee."

He drank the coffee hot, nearly burning his tongue but it sobered him up no end.

"But why should I scream the house down?" McKenna asked. Laborde was pouring out more coffee and probably did not hear him. "It's not so easy at my age." He said that under his breath and it was not intended for Laborde. After Laborde's third cup of coffee they went into the sitting-room and Adams, like a true believer, was kneeling in front of the book-case. He straightened himself.

"If you don't mind," he said, "I'm going to take these. I'll let you have them back when you come round next time. The chacula was good. But I must go."

"But you have nothing to do," Laborde said. He had a strong desire for a nap, from which he would surely wake in a bad mood on account of his liver. Still, that would be preferable to driving about in the hot sun.

"I know," Adams said, "but I'm going. Come on."

McKenna saw them off and waited in the glare till the decrepit car disappeared in the dust which to-day was of a dirty reddish colour. Then he went to his office and sat there till Ali brought him his tea.

After tea he decided to go for a walk. The basset hound followed him sadly. The heat was sitting on the world but as they came near to the umbrella thorns a breeze began to shake the heat a little. That revived the basset hound. So, said McKenna to himself, Laborde wants me to shriek the house down. And what would happen if the house did not come down notwithstanding the shrieking? If Laborde had had another glass of hock he might have suggested that only the shrieking was important and the house was an afterthought. But

Laborde would not have thought of that. Not even if he had drunk three more glasses. He began to feel pleasantly sleepy and lit a cigarette because he did not want to fall asleep. He lay flat in the grass and the basset hound sniffed his chin and he gently pushed him away.

It was easy to give advice. Many people had given him advice in his time and looking back he could not recollect whether he had taken it or not. Apparently they had not changed the course of his life. Nothing really could. For he believed that there was a road on which you had to tramp along but you were free to tramp in your own style. As you had no control of your destination and did not know where the road led, the only thing you could do was to move precisely, with dignity, and not to lurch and not to sway. That alone was at your disposal. The question was: did the dignified walk help in the end or did it not? If he came to think of it it was of no paramount importance. Style is your own personal pleasure, especially as the fellow-tramps might not notice it at all. From a great distance there came thunder. But the clouds were drifting towards the Aberdares and soon the sky would be blue again as it had been in the morning. And thinking of the road along which in his youth he had hoped to walk with a clear Christian conscience, he began to wonder how Gloria would progress on it. And the baby. It was not easy to imagine a road for someone so fragile and so helpless as a baby. Nevertheless there it was. The feet that had not as yet the strength to support the light little body were already firmly planted on that road which would take the child through mystery into mystery.

The child had behaved very well at the christening which had taken place the day before yesterday. It had not been a gay affair. The godmother was the wife of a Government official. She was a Catholic and that was her sole claim to becoming the godmother. In a country where there are few Catholics one cannot pick and choose. The dear lady knew why Miles had asked her and she knew just as well that if it had not been Miles's intention to bring up the child in his own faith, she would have been the last person the Wace's would have thought of asking. But there it was and she held the baby over the font, and she was aware that her connections with the child ended more or less that moment. Gloria did not like her and she was unable to force herself to like Gloria. Miles she had preferred and she could not say no to him when a few months ago he came to her at his wits' end to find a Catholic woman to act as godmother to the child he was looking forward to so much. The child never cried and when it was christened McKenna imagined that it had smiled out of pure joy for having escaped Limbo.

"Poor little mite," the godmother said as they left the Church of the Holy Family. "To start life with such a handicap."

"I'll do my best for him," McKenna said louder than it was warranted.

It was a hot day and the godmother, who was a pale, sickly woman and hated living so far from her native Tunbridge Wells, sighed as she pushed the pram back to the nursing home.

"If," she said, "he lives to a ripe age even then he won't know what the love of a father means. But," she said as she stopped to take breath, "there is a Father who is as much his as ours. I shall pray for him a lot."

She was not well off and that was the only present she could give the child beside a small crucifix and the customary spoon that had been hers and so she did not go to any expense. "But," she said, "he's going to be a sweet child. I feel it in here." She patted her flat bosom and turned to McKenna. "Could you push the pram for a few minutes Major McKenna? I am rather out of breath." He felt hot and frightened. "I know," she went on, "that many men object to pushing-prams but I'm sure you're above that."

"Of course," he said in an unconvinced voice.

He pushed the pram and he was surprised how cumbersome and heavy a pram was; but very likely he did not know the tricks of pram pushing. She let him push it till they reached the nursing home and he perspired profusely. The child was awake. He could see the blue eyes that were as transparent as the sea when it is deep and there are no weeds to darken the deep. The white tiny face was a sharp contrast to the blue of the eyes. The godmother carried the baby up to Gloria's room. Gloria received her as a queen and was gracious, and the pale, sickly woman did not linger, but after drinking a cup of tea (it was eleven in the morning) she took her leave and kissed the baby's hand and whispered, "I'll pray for you every day." That was her parting present and McKenna thought that she and the child would never meet again.

The basset hound growled and McKenna looked up, and there was complete silence and the sky had shaken off the clouds. And that, he said to himself, brought him to Gloria. But his mind went blank. He lay quietly and pulled the basset hound's ears. Gently; the dog enjoyed it and wagged his tail. "You lazy fat man," he said. When the child reached the age of consciousness he would make it a present of a dog. He hoped it would be as nice and philosophical a creature as the basset hound. A dog of that sort would give the child faith in humanity which human beings could not destroy.

Oh, how good it was lying there under the tree; however, he must

go and supervise the milking. He stood up and with his stick patted the large umbrella thorn in the middle.

He walked down to the milk shed and there was the stench of the dead heifers, and Masai was waiting for him and said, "He will come back here."

"I'm not so sure," McKenna said.

They talked it over and eventually they decided to move one of the dead heifers down to the edge of the ridge. Masai was excited. He waited for the night as one waits for a lover. The night came with its customary suddenness. The night is in a hurry around the Equator. After nine o'clock, when all noises had died down and the usual confabulation in the kitchen had been broken up by Masai, McKenna descended the ridge and lay down near the dead heifer, well camouflaged by the red stones and a thorn bush. There was no moon. Masai lay beside him. He had an old Portuguese Mauser. McKenna had taught him to shoot though it was understood that he was not allowed to fire a shot when his master was about. But to hold a rifle was almost enough for Masai. They lay there quietly, waiting, and there were odd distant sounds which at times sounded unbelievably near.

Hyænas howled but hyænas always howl. You could hear the groaning of a hyrax. Then a hyæna hooted quite near. McKenna listened: the hyæna was approaching. It came stealthily like the thief in the night that it was. Suddenly it was beside the dead heifer, and then its heavy jaws began to munch. The crunching noise was avid and so utterly revolting and so completely the symbol of an alien world, that McKenna said to himself with the promptness of a command that as it was six years since he had been to England he must go home and have a holiday. His own thought surprised him; but he would go home and away from here, for he needed a change. The putrid smell of the hyæna and the crunching jaws put the lid on the six years. He wished he could get up and return to his house without having to shoot the lion.

His wish was short-lived. The hyæna had stopped crunching. He felt that the beast was listening. Then as stealthily as it had come it disappeared. The silence became positive and expectant. McKenna pushed down the safety-catch. A stone moved, then some undergrowth broke, but there was an eternity between the two sounds. He felt Masai stiffening beside him. It is unbelievable how strongly you feel things at such moments. Then the lion became a defined shape, as if an eerie light had picked it out. He would give it another two yards. That was not more than half a second. Then he fired. The lion fell forward and it was more of a lurch than a fall. He fired a second time and the lion became motionless. In a sense it was

disappointing that he was such a good shot. And he wanted to be far from killing and death and the misery of the vicious circle of self-preservation and murder. Masai began to move.

"Wait," he said and pushed him to the ground.

You do not go up to a lion after you have shot it. You wait at least for ten minutes. So they waited and after three minutes the lion kicked.

"You see," he said. "Now you'd be dead."

Hyænas began to hoot again. They had already forgotten the two shots. McKenna looked at the luminous dial of his watch. It was ten minutes. He got up and took out his torch and shone it on the lion. It was a young lion and had not much of a mane. It lay sideways and both shots had gone where he had intended. He stared hard at the dead lion and it seemed to him that Adams was right. "I want the skin," he said to Masai and walked away. He met two natives who came running towards him. One of them was carrying a lamp. He said a few words to them and then he mounted the ridge.

It was a queer feeling to kill a lion. Somehow a lion stood for such a lot till you met him. The emblem of your country, the king of beasts and a constant illustrated visitor of your childhood. Yet his first meeting with that heraldic beast had been an anticlimax. It was in the Sudan: he was still a soldier in those days. Accompanied by a few natives he went on a safari. That was how he was spending his leave. He had reached a hill and there before him was a complete royal family. Two lion cubs, the lion and the lioness. The king of beasts took to its heels; the lioness, however, charged him. Since then he had often felt that was not much of a story to remember, notwithstanding the fact that he had missed the lioness and she got uncomfortably near before he finished her off.

He went into the house and Ali was waiting for him. "Sir, good luck?" Ali asked.

He said that luck had been with him. "I'm going to bed," he added. As he reached his bedroom it came back to him that he had made up his mind to go away for a time. It returned with such urgency that he had to exercise most of his self-control in order not to pack and take the car and be gone. He went to the sitting-room and sat down and wrote a letter to Eric Winslow asking him to come over the next morning. "Send a boy with this chit early in the morning," he said to Ali.

Eric Winslow was a young man of twenty one and he had been born in the colony. Kenya was his natural surroundings. Africa was his and never did the dark night tell him that he was a stranger and belonged elsewhere. He was a quiet civil lad and he was modest

as befits a host. His parents were poor and he took on any job that was going. The usual job was for him to act as manager while the owner went home for a holiday. (Now then Eric don't let the dogs sleep on the verandah: a leopard might come and take them away.) He received McKenna's chit after breakfast and took the old 1925 Oakland for which he had paid a fiver, a tyre burst after he left the township, and he was hot but cheerful when he arrived around noon. "Sorry to be late," he said.

"Well, Eric," McKenna said, "I've decided to go home for a little while. I want you, if you're free, to come and live on the farm and look after it in my absence."

"I should like that very much," the young man said.

"Come to my office."

They went to the office and as everything was kept in perfect order, and since McKenna had the habit of keeping a detailed and precise diary connected with farm matters, it did not take him long to hand the farm, lock, stock and barrel, over to Eric.

"I'll love to work here," Eric said. "You run your farm so well." His eyes were the expressive witnesses of his admiration.

"You'd better stay for luncheon," McKenna said.

"A car is coming," Eric said, and because he was a well-mannered young man he added, "Thank you, I'd like to stay very much."

It was Betty Newton. "Could I take pot luck?" she shouted before she got out of the car.

"I'd be delighted," McKenna said.

She saw Eric. "Eric is here," she said. "I thought I could talk to you alone."

"He came over because I'm going to England for a few months and he'll look after the farm in the meantime."

"Really?" She was surprised and annoyed. "Morning, Eric," she shouted to the young man standing in the doorway. "Do you mind if I talk to David in private for a minute? I know you won't mind."

"Of course not," Eric said and blushed.

"Come to the office, Betty," McKenna said. "Eric, you go to the sitting-room and have a drink."

"I never drink in the daytime," Eric said, and still blushing went into the house.

Betty examined the office carefully. An office with ledgers and files was a further and rather convincing proof of man's stupidity. She was certain that she, the woman, would have managed to keep all that stuff in her head without having recourse to those silly books. But men must be tolerated and so she resisted the natural impulse of

throwing the books and ledgers through the window. Besides, it was uncommonly hot.

"You lucky man," she said. "Going home."

"I haven't been to England for six years."

"But why did you choose to go now?"

"As good a time as any."

Betty was sitting on the writing-desk, the blotting-pad was under her and it was crumpled because she had not sat down carefully. McKenna had an eye on the large blotting-pad of which but little was visible. He would have to throw it away after she had left.

"I honestly thought," she said, "that you'd have stayed here till Gloria got back and settled down again."

"I don't see what difference my presence would make to Gloria."

"A lot." She had not the right figure for jodhpores yet she always wore them. "It would make all the difference in the world. The poor girl is so lonely. You musn't forget that you were her husband's best friend." She waited for him to speak, but as he said nothing she went on. "If you want to know the truth poor foolish Miles died completely broke. What is going to become of her?" Since men are sentimentalists she added in a stage whisper, "And what will become of the baby? Poor little orphan."

"I quite see your point," McKenna said, "but I believe I have found a temporary way out for her. Anyway, I saw her in Nairobi and she fell in with my suggestions."

"May I know what your suggestions were?" Betty asked in a tolerant yet sarcastic voice. She did not think much of other people's suggestions.

"I'm sure that Gloria will tell you if she wants to," McKenna said.

"You're very secretive."

"No, but I feel it's for her to discuss her private affairs."

"Thank you for the rebuke," Betty said getting up. The blotting-pad was in a poor state.

"I didn't want to rebuke you."

They stood there near the writing-desk and they were exactly of the same height and neither of them spoke. Now there were two ways out for Betty. Either to be deeply offended and to depart in a huff, or to joke the whole thing off. It suited her instincts to make a rude remark and to go out and then to wait for an apology which should by rights be delivered before she closed the door of her car. But she looked at McKenna and she decided to joke it off.

"Full to the brim with Gloria's secrets," she said and laughed. He didn't even smile, so she said quickly, "I'm sure you've been very generous. I know you'll agree with me that something must be done

about the child. How did you like him? I thought he was absolutely sweet."

"He frightened me a little," McKenna said. "He looked so fragile and so old."

"Oh, you are silly, David. Old. Never heard such rubbish in my life."

"Probably it is rubbish but somehow he gave me the impression that he had had more experience than most of us. You see there are only two great experiences in life. Birth and death. That nearness to birth I suppose gives him that superior knowing look. That's why he looks so old."

He had not wanted to say that to Betty and he regretted his words, but Betty said, "I don't think you're right. If birth and death are the only two great experiences in life, then all I can say is that none of us ever experienced them. The baby didn't feel birth and Miles didn't feel death. In fact neither of them participated in either death or birth."

"Probably you're right," he said, "but perhaps there is more to it. It would be wonderful if we knew." He smiled at her. "You're very clever, Betty. Now let's go and eat." Betty beamed and she was wellnigh ready to admit that he was not a fool either. But then he said, "Still, I don't see how my staying or going would affect Gloria."

They were back at the start and with that as-you-were feeling they crossed the compound and their brogues churned up the red dust. She made a rapid calculation. He must have given Gloria at least three hundred pounds, maybe more would follow. Still one should strike the iron while it was hot.

"You're an unmarried man with no ties," she said. "Why don't you settle some money on your godson. It would be such a noble action."

"I think that's an excellent idea," he said. "Thank you for the suggestion."

She couldn't resist biting her lip. He was in more ways than one an impossible creature.

They lunched on cold lamb, pickles, sweet potatoes and salad. It was cool in the dining-room. The verandah kept the sun and heat out. Once during luncheon Eric said, "Are you going to London?"

"Yes."

"I wonder what it must be like. You know my sister went there three years ago. She didn't like it."

"Was it the weather?" Betty asked, thinking nostalgically of fog and rain.

"No. She didn't like seeing white people doing low jobs. The second day in London she got up early in the morning and went to the lavatory in her hotel and, believe it or believe it not, she found a white woman cleaning it."

Betty burst out laughing and McKenna, because he did not want to see Eric blush again, said quickly, "And I don't think you'd like the overcrowded streets."

"No, I wouldn't like them. Life must be so cramped there. Thank God here it's free and easy."

"I never found life free and easy," McKenna said, and since he had not intended to say that aloud took the bottle of beer from the sideboard and poured beer into Eric's glass.

"I don't drink in the daytime," Eric said.

Betty left immediately after luncheon. McKenna saw her to the car and before she let in the clutch she said, "So you won't forget about the baby?"

"I promise I won't."

As she drove away she wondered whether she should send a telegram to Gloria, or just write to her.

Eric left a little later and McKenna went out on to the verandah and the world was satiated with the afternoon heat. There was utter silence. There were clouds on the edge of the horizon and a dark one in front of the sun. The swamp was the only contrast to dust and heat, though the yellow colour of the papyrus reeds was very much in harmony with the dour heat that sat even upon the Aderdares. Impatience gripped him and as an antidote he took out his cigarette case and slowly, with uttermost care, took a cigarette; and then he was not any calmer. The idea came to him that he should go and sit under the umbrella thorn but he dismissed it, for under the tree he might argue himself out of going to England.

He turned to the basset hound. He patted the fat neck and the basset hound raised his eyes and they were sad as if he were already commiserating with himself for the coming absence of his master.

PART TWO

(I)

MCKENNA GOT OUT OF THE TAXI AND WONDERED how large a tip he should give the driver. He should not have forgotten that sort of thing. He gave him tentatively a shilling and the driver thanked him, so that must have been the right amount. He went up to the door and rang the bell and remembered that sixpence would have been enough. While he waited he looked up and down the street. The evening was coming with the twilight marching before it like an advance guard. Kensington was fat and genteel and decorously quiet. It was the ideal setting for his sister. He could not have imagined her, for instance, in Bloomsbury. The lamps were lit and the sky was of anæmic blue, and it was not as cold as February warranted. The door opened and a maid in a chocolate-coloured uniform and complete with cap peeped at him, and he asked, "Is Mrs. Bentley at home?"

"Yes, sir," she said with a strong foreign accent. "What name, please?"

"Major McKenna, her brother."

She ushered him into the hall and there was fake William and Mary furniture and a grandfather-clock not far from the staircase. The maid opened the drawing-room door and he went in and the maid went off to find his sister Louisa. It was a fine drawing-room. The walls were panelled and the furniture was Adam and a fire was burning bright and comfortable. Over the fireplace there was a canvas by Sickert in a Louis XIII frame. McKenna had not to wait long. His sister Louisa came flying in.

"I can't believe it," she said. She kissed him and then she said, "Let me look at you."

He smiled at her. They were of the same height and she had the same eyes, but there the likeness ended. Louisa was pale and had a thick, not too healthy, skin. Her hair was grey, and because she considered grey hair distinguished she did nothing about it. But even if she had thought that grey hair spoiled her looks she would have done nothing about it. She was now forty-five years old and had a son at Sandhurst and a daughter at Lady Margaret Hall. Moreover, she had a husband who was an amiable successful stockbroker, and she had many friends and a house in Kensington and a house in Sussex.

She spent a fortnight every winter on the Riviera (preferably at Cannes) and three weeks at Le Touquet in summer, so taking everything into consideration she had not really to bother about her looks and appearance. She dressed soberly and expensively. She was clean, but her cleanliness was of the kitchen soap and scrubbing brush variety. She did not believe in any sort of nonsense. Surprisingly enough her brother David was a symbol of nonsense to her. Nevertheless she was fond of him, for he was her brother and her baby brother at that.

"It's marvellous to see you," she said. "I hope you've come back for good, and now you should settle down like a sensible man. I must say you look very fit. Fitter than when you were here last time. But, of course, that was just after you had all that trouble. You'll have a glass of sherry. John will be back at any moment."

"I've only come home for a holiday."

"What a pity," she said without too much conviction in her voice. "I'm always hoping that you're going to marry again and live like the rest of us. You must be forty-one. It's time to settle down."

"Louisa, if you saw me in Kenya you'd realize that I've settled down out there for once and for all."

"I don't believe one can settle down in the Colonies."

"One can settle down anywhere."

That was so final that he could have got up and kissed her and have gone straight back to Kenya.

"Besides," he said, "my outlook on life is pretty simple."

"I wouldn't call you simple," Louisa said good-humouredly, "To have landed grandmother's money at the age of nine is jolly clever."

She laughed to show that her annoyance and jealousy of more than thirty years ago had left her completely.

"It wasn't I who landed the inheritance," he said. "It was our dear father who got it for me against his will."

"Now don't say a word against your dead father. He was a very kind man."

"I'm sure he was."

"While you're here I hope you'll go and visit your brother Alastair."

"Of course. How is he?"

"You'll see for yourself. He was always a source of worry to me; but you'll see for yourself. He isn't in good health, though I'm sure he's not as poorly as he considers himself to be."

Louisa sighed, because she was so healthy and yet had to put up with invalids. The maid came in with the sherry which was good sherry, the sort of sherry a successful stockbroker would like. Louisa talked of her children. Of her son she said, "At times we're sorry

that we sent him to Sandhurst. You see there won't be anybody to take over the firm when John retires. But John says let the boy have his fun. We can afford it." McKenna nodded, since he felt that she was not expecting him to say anything. "Eddie loves it at Sandhurst. He's very keen." She leaned forward. "What do you think of it? I mean, what do you think of the regular army?"

"I love the army. I loved being a soldier."

"And yet you threw up your career. I thought you'd end up as a general."

"That's an old story. I'm trying to forget it."

"But you regret it, don't you?"

"I regret it bitterly every minute of my life."

There followed a short silence and Louisa's next words came into the silence like a pair of heavy boots.

"I saw Margery the other day."

"I'm not interested. Please, Louisa, don't talk of her."

"But she always asks after you."

"I'm sure she does," he said, and poured himself out more sherry.

"But surely that's not a reason for me to talk of her."

"After all these years one shouldn't be so fussy."

"Louisa, I beg you."

"You're a prig."

"I know I'm a prig. Please humour the prig."

"All right, but I thought that after seven or eight years . . ."

She got up and patted his arm and he was not angry any more.

"Tell me about life in Kenya," she said after she had returned to her chair, "it must be very thrilling. The Happy Valley and all that."

"It isn't thrilling and the Happy Valley is dead. But I like the country very much. My dear, it's getting on. I'd better go."

"You must wait for John. He'll be hurt if you don't wait."

"But I'm dining with an old friend," he lied.

"Let him wait. You must see John."

There was nothing else to do but to wait.

"Tell me," he said suddenly, "did you love your children when they were born, or did it take you some time to become fond of them?"

"I was fond of them before they were born."

"Isn't that a sweeping statement?"

"It's nothing of the sort. But why do you ask me?"

"Just idle curiosity," he said, and he was annoyed with himself because he felt so depressed. "Are there mothers who dislike their children?"

"If there are such mothers they deserve to be flogged."

It was time, he thought, to drop the subject. Soon Mr. Bentley

arrived. He was a huge man with a large florid complexion. He wore his grey hair brushed back and he had plenty of hair and he imagined that he looked like an important artist. By an artist he meant either a wealthy actor-manager or a conductor with a world-wide reputation. He said he was glad to see his brother-in-law. They fixed up a luncheon in the City and then a dinner at the house, and the week-end after next a week-end in Sussex. They had some more sherry and McKenna thought that it was nice to have relations, and to be with people he had known most of his life. When he left them he regretted that he had said that he had a date with an old friend. He had no date with anybody, and as the door closed behind him, chipping off the end of Bentley's hearty good night, he felt the loneliness of the city of eight million inhabitants descending on him.

He walked slowly and came into Thurloe Street, and out of a house came a woman and a man and they were in high spirits and got into a car and drove off. Somehow that made him feel even lonelier. He went into South Kensington tube station and took a ticket to Piccadilly. He stood in the lift squashed in a crowd of people who had the whole night before them and were looking forward to it. A girl not far from him gave him the glad eye. Then a man shoved himself into the view and he saw her no more. In Piccadilly Circus he asked himself why he had come to Piccadilly Circus. He stood in the tube entrance and the thought came to him that he should go to a cinema. There were plenty of cinemas about. He had not forgotten that, though six years had chugged by since he had last been to the films. His wife used to be an addict of the cinema. He wished Louisa had not mentioned her. It is not amusing to watch somebody else opening a door which one imagined was locked.

"One stall?" the girl in the box-office asked.

"Yes, one, please," he said.

The main film was on. If you go to the cinema after an absence of six years you realize at once that that acquired taste has left you. It was not a good film. It was a love story and people drove about a lot in motor-cars. For the life of him McKenna could not understand what it was about. Not only could he not understand the film but he could work up no desire to do so. He wished he had rather gone to have a drink somewhere instead.

"Gloria," he had asked when he went to say good-bye to her, "may I ask you a question?"

"Of course, David, you can ask any question."

It was well after sunset and she looked beautiful with the light on. Her face was thin and her hair falling profusely on both sides accentuated the fallen in cheeks.

"Are you fond of the baby?"

He immediately regretted that he had put such a leading question to her. It was in bad taste and it was not his business. But he had just come from the nursery and the baby appeared very old and frail.

"Of course I am," she said. "But why do you ask that?"

She was a little frightened, but ever since he had told her about the thousand pounds she had been a bit frightened of him. In Miles's lifetime she had not taken any interest in him; for he bored her and often she could not be bothered to hide her boredom. But now she wanted to please him, and if you go out of your way to try and please you cannot but be a trifle frightened.

"But why do you ask that?" she asked again.

She leant forward and her nightie had slipped and must have got somehow entangled with the blanket, and the curve of her breasts was visible and the skin was gloriously white. He was not looking at her.

"I saw the baby on my way to you," he said, "and he seemed so lonely, so terribly lonely." He shook his head. "My stupid fancy."

Gloria adjusted her nightie. "I'll be a good mother," she said, and thought that any other man would instinctively have noticed her breasts, even if he was not looking. "You can trust me. I'll never let the baby down. And I won't let you down. I know how wonderful you are to me and I'll consider myself your debtor all my life. You're the best man in the world." In the mirror she could see the shape of her breasts. How Miles had loved those breasts.

"Please don't say that," McKenna said. "It was the least I could do."

"You know," the hero of the film said, "that I loved you from the start."

That was satisfactory as far as the audience was concerned, but Gloria had simply evaded the question. She must be back on her farm by now. Was the child still lonely? Or are they all lonely at that age? The great experience and then the anticlimax of being helpless and generally speaking a nuisance. He did not know and he wished so much that he could know. The film was over and he looked at his watch. It was only half-past eight. He was not hungry. Donald Duck appeared on the screen and he watched him with concentrated interest. Perhaps, he said to himself without a smile, Donald Duck could answer the problem. Donald Duck became extremely angry and it was now out of the question to ask him for an answer. A boy and girl sat beside him and they were holding hands. They held hands as though their hands were independent beings and they had no control of them. "Sorry," McKenna said and the boy

rose in order to let him pass. His hand did not leave the girl's hand.

McKenna went out into the street and a cold impersonal winter drizzle made the street look as though it were made of patent leather. Soon he was back in Piccadilly Circus and he walked up Piccadilly as far as Fortnum & Mason, and then turned into Duke Street, and then turned to the left and then to the right, and then at a street corner he saw a man going into a pub, and he did not see why he should not have a drink too. The saloon bar was a posh place with a palm in the corner and there were several mirrors and one plush settee. A man was behind the bar. Probably the proprietor.

"Yes sir?" the man said.

McKenna ordered a large whisky. He drank it up quickly and as the man was still standing there he asked him for another.

"Not a nice night," the man said.

"Rather cold," McKenna said. He expected the man to make a further remark about the weather, but another customer entered and the man went over to him and McKenna remained alone with his drink. An elderly couple sat on the settee. The man was comparatively sober but the woman was tight. She smiled nonsensically, and at times she became thoughtful and looked at the man and was going to say something of intrinsic importance. However her drunkenness was controlling her tongue and the channels through which the mind communicated with the tongue. So she just said nothing, though the preparatory look returned a little later. Once she thought that she had made the pronouncement and giggled triumphantly. After the giggle she was less sure about it. The man behind the counter caught McKenna's eye and said, "A large one?"

"Yes please."

While he poured out the drink the door swung open and in the wake of cold wet air a woman came in. She was of medium height and wore a short fur coat. The coat was wet. Her silk stockings were splashed but she had a fine pair of legs. She was pale and had dark eyes and her prettiness would not last long and podginess would take its place. But not for a year or so. She smiled at McKenna as if they were old friends, and she turned to the man and said, "Give me a gin and lime, and make it a large one before I change my mind." She thought that was amusing and she laughed. When the drink came she said to McKenna that it was an awful night. "What one wants on a night like this," she went on, "is to sit before a cosy fire. I like cosy fires."

Though she had plenty of drink in her she spoke in a genteel shop-girl voice. Her face was not well made up and there was too much powder on it. "A nice cosy fire," she said. "There are people who

like central heating but give me a cosy fire every time." Then in order to explain the reason why, she added, "Marion is a country girl," Marion being herself. She smiled and she was pleased because knowledge gained through experience told her that she was in the company of a sucker. She looked at her wet stockings.

"I had a real fight with a girl friend this evening," she said. "She kept me waiting at the Bricklayers Arms for half an hour. I don't like people which keep me waiting. I'm always punctual. I always say: keep your promises, be punctual and don't hurt nobody."

That was the stuff to give a sucker.

"Yes," McKenna said. He did not know what else he should say.

"Yes, of course."

"Well," she said, "a second drink won't do me harm." She said that in a refined abstemious voice. She leaned over the counter to call the man, and as she leaned over her hand unobtrusively touched McKenna's hand and gave it a squeeze. "Have it with me," he said. She patted his arm. The drinks arrived and she said, "Why don't you come to my little flat? It's so cosy there." Her hand touched his again, sharply, and then she withdrew it and smiled at him and it was a large bold smile.

"I'll be good to you," she said. "I'm a real sport."

"I'll come," he said.

"You won't regret it, duckie."

As they went out of the pub the drunken woman looked up and nodded with all the wisdom drink and age give, and when the door closed behind them she spat and succeeded in blurting out the word prostitute. Having imparted that unnecessary piece of information she returned to her lofty thoughts. The sport took McKenna through rainsodden streets. He felt a sudden surprising lack of patience and that moment he would have preferred torture and death to not going to bed with the woman trotting beside him. She took his arm.

"I've got whisky in my room," she said. "We'll be ever so cosy." She pressed his arm and they crossed over and she said, "You will be good to me. Marion is a clever little girl."

Shortly after she asked him what his name was; for she wanted to demonstrate that she was taking a personal interest in her client.

"David," he said and it sounded fatuous to him.

"What a pretty name. I know you're a gentleman. You'll be good to me. I'm a real sport." They turned a corner. "Here we are."

The door was half open. She pushed past it and they were in a dark corridor and she walked ahead of him, and then she went up the stairs and he followed. The house smelt of clandestine poverty

and sordidness. She took him up to the fourth floor. She was out of breath by the time they reached her room. There was a double bed in the middle, an arm chair near the window, a cupboard with a mirror on the other side of the room and facing the bed a sideboard with a mirror. A half eaten sandwich lay on a saucer, which seemed forlorn without the cup. There was the photograph of a gaudy young woman on the wall. A calendar said that it was the 3rd of June three years ago.

"I'll light the gas," she said. "Give me a bob."

She lit the gas and she said, "Come on duckie, let's undress."

Her tone had changed. She took off her fur coat and pulled her dress over her head, and her hair got entangled in the dress and she became angry, but eventually her hair was free and she threw the dress on the sideboard. "Pay me now duckie," she said, "then we won't have to talk about it afterwards. It's so much better to settle such things first." She said that as though she were trying to be helpful to him.

"All right."

"Give me five quid," she said.

He took five pounds from his wallet and gave them to her. She counted the money and with incredible deftness made one of the notes disappear. "There are only four."

"I gave you five."

"Now don't try to be funny. You only gave me four. A shabby trick I call that and I thought you was a gentleman." She stood there angry in her underwear, but he did not see the mean anger; he was looking at her thighs which were slim and exciting.

"Have that other pound," he said.

She took it and took her chemise off. "I have a good figure," she said complacently. "You wouldn't believe it duckie that I had a baby, would you? Poor little mite died when she was six months old. Now come on, undress, I 'aven't the whole night to wait."

"What about a drink?" he asked. His voice came from far away. It was detached the same way as he was detached from the man who was unbuttoning the waistcoat.

"I can get a bottle," she said, "but that will be two quid. I must give the money to my girl friend next door. The off licence is closed, so she must get it from a posh night club. Give me three quid, we must give something to my girl friend."

She took the three pounds, threw a dirty dressing gown over her shoulder and went out. She came back and said not too pleasantly,

"It's coming in a moment. Come here, duckie. You know I'm a sport."

She was not a sport. When McKenna was ready to go he asked her about the bottle of whisky.

"I don't know," she said. "Maybe my girl friend didn't find a bottle. Now you must go. I can't keep you here the whole night."

He went and his docility surprised her so much that she imagined there was a catch to it, and she banged the door quickly and locked it.

He stopped in the doorway to light a cigarette. The rain was beating hard on the pavement and the splashing was a pleasing sequence of sounds. Nine pounds, he said to himself. And that made him think of Gloria's baby and one might have bought such a lot for nine pounds for a small lonely child like that.

(II)

His brother-in-law took him to lunch in the City and the restaurant was spruce and people were brisk and sedately vigorous, and there was a sense of prosperity about the place and Mr. Bentley was the symbol of it all. He talked of this, that, and the other and said very frankly that he could not understand how anybody could waste his time in a primitive country. "We must move with the times," he said. "Out there you seem to be five hundred years behind."

"But I like the life out there."

"I can't understand you. You're rich enough to live here. One should only go abroad if one can't afford to live here."

"Probably you're right."

It would be a hopeless task to argue with him. Anyway, you cannot argue about such matters. And the steak and kidney pudding arrived.

"I have a message from Louisa," said Mr. Bentley. "Your brother Alastair rang up and he wants you to go and see him."

"Where is he? In Scotland?"

When McKenna was born there were exactly seven lives between the baronetcy and his brother Alastair. Now Alastair was the baronet. They had not died conspicuously, only one after the other, and there was a moment when Mr. McKenna the father was the heir of a boy of ten, but he died and then the boy of ten died too.

"Didn't you know?" Mr. Bentley asked.

"Know what?"

Mr. Bentley looked at his rice pudding and shook his head. "Talking to you is like talking to Rip Van Winkle. Your brother sold the family place in Argyll and bought himself a house near Weston in Hertfordshire. It was a sound idea. Real estate in Hertfordshire

is more valuable than in the Highlands. It was very wise of him. Have a liqueur brandy."

They had liqueur brandies and next morning McKenna took train to Stevenage and there he took a taxi to his brother's house. Snow lay in the fields and his eyes loved the snow; for they had seen the sun almost too often. His brother's house was a late Eighteenth Century brick building, and the brick was of that perfect colour which you mostly find in Hertfordshire; and the snow seemed to embrace the house. His brother was now forty-six years old. He was tall and broad and given to corpulence. He had a large moustache and he was wearing a brown corduroy suit and that made him look simply immense.

"Well, David," he said, "I'm glad to see you."

"I'm very glad to see you."

"How slim you are. Look at me. Forty-three round the waist." He took his brother by the arm and they went into the library which was full of bookshelves but lacking in books.

"It's not so simple to buy books," Alastair said. "I bought this place two years ago. I'd need about six thousand books to fill the shelves. I've got Walter Scott and Dickens and Tennyson and God knows what, but you see the shelves are empty. What should I do about it? I go into bookshops and ask for books and they say what books and it's no good my saying Dickens or Walter Scott because I've got them. What the hell am I to do? I don't want the collected edition of *Punch*. Anyway I have the *Encyclopædia Britannica*."

"You should buy a whole library," McKenna said. "That'll save you a lot of trouble." He was thinking of Adams and the rows and rows of books lying on the dirty floor of his house.

"A grand idea," Alastair said. "Let's go and eat."

He took him to the dining room and there was a butler and a footman and he remembered how differently his brother used to live in the old days, though that was neither here nor there.

"I'm not allowed to drink," Alastair said with a sigh. "I've got stones in my kidneys. But I suppose you'd like some beer." McKenna was given a glass of lager. "I suppose," Alastair went on, "that you can eat and drink anything you want."

"I suppose so."

"You lucky devil. Still, David you must admit that I didn't do so badly either. You landed granny's money and I landed the baronetcy cum a nice bit of money. So now we can shake hands."

He laughed the boisterous laugh of a man who is not well and is mortally afraid of death. His laugh was a challenge but the challenged

one was biding his time and thus he would not take up the challenge.

"You realize," he said, "that if I die you'll get the title."

"It wouldn't be of much use to me."

"Now come on, it's a nice thing to have a title. In the old days whenever I went to London and asked for a room in a hotel they either had a room or they hadn't. But now I've just got to say that I'm Sir Alastair McKenna and you ought to see how they jump and kowtow."

"But I spend very little time in hotels, so it wouldn't help me."

Alastair had finished his omelette fines herbes and sipped a little Vichy water and then he rose. "Come to my study," he said. "Thank God they haven't stopped me drinking coffee." The study was a small room with brown leather arm chairs, and there was only one bookshelf and it displayed the works of Edgar Wallace, Agatha Christie and the plums of the Crime Book Club. They seemed at home and that gave their spines a lot of vitality.

"Do you ever get malaria out there?" Alastair asked. There was an eager look in his eyes.

"I used to have it on and off for many years but nowadays I seldom have a go of it."

"I thought so. You look ruddy healthy to me. Still I can't complain. I have some of the best men of Harley Street at my beck and call and they say I can go on like this for another fifty years. You know that the universe is based on snobbery, so surely death wouldn't dare to behave disrespectfully to me, the eleventh baronet." He laughed but he was not quite sure of himself. Perhaps death considered his joke in bad taste.

"You'll live to be a hundred. Tell me why did you sell the family seat?"

"You've been to the family seat haven't you?"

"When I was a kid."

"And what did you think of it?"

"I thought it was ghastly."

"Well, I thought the same."

"But Alastair it was the family seat. The Victorian idea of a laird's castle."

The brothers burst into laughter. "It's nice to see you again," Alastair said and took his brother's hand, then let go of it and they were both moved and neither of them spoke for a while. The coffee arrived and Alastair drank his with milk.

"Now tell me about yourself," he said. "I haven't seen you for donkey's years. Are you still the pedant and the holy man?"

"Holy man? Last night I went to bed with a whore."

"You didn't."

"I did."

"Almost becoming human."

"Oh no. You ought to see me out in Kenya sitting under my tree."

"Your tree?"

"Yes, there is a large umbrella thorn on my farm and whenever I go and sit under it I feel as if I understood everything and knew that my understanding made everything perfect, and when I'm not under that tree I'm afraid of making a fool of myself, though as I've told you last night I did sleep with a whore."

Alastair sat back and sighed a stagey sigh. "I feel flattered," he said. "Thank you for speaking so frankly to me for the first time in your life."

Those words made McKenna blush: the fact that his brother was a disappointed sick man had somehow loosened his tongue.

"I am very glad to be with you again," he said.

"You're a queer chap," Alastair said. "But we are a queer family and nobody could deny that. I'm not unhappy but I hate being unwell and do you know," he leaned forward, "I'm afraid. I know I'm going to die and I'm afraid of it. It's no bloody good to say that one isn't afraid of death. I know you're not afraid of death because you're healthy and you're fit and life is something you take for granted and so you don't notice it. But I'm aware of life because it's slipping from my grasp. I am aware of it and I know it's a damned fine thing and I could sit down and cry because I'm losing it. You remember when you came up to Edinburgh last time you were over here? That was just after Margery left you. You got dead drunk and you cried. Well, I'm crying too. I am crying because I am losing life."

"Alastair, you shouldn't speak like that."

"I must return the compliment. You sitting under a tree. The first frank confession of your life. Well, you must hear my frank confession. The retort courteous. That was a drawing by Bateman. Saw it in my local pub twice a day in Edinburgh. But the proud baronet doesn't go to the local. He's not allowed to drink. No more locals for him." He wiped a tear away; another dropped into his moustache. "But I haven't finished, David. I cry for life, for lost beautiful life but I cry with fear too. I don't know what death is, nobody knows what death is. Would you set out on a journey of which you knew nothing and could get no information about it?"

"I think I would."

"I'm sure you would as long as you called it a journey. Such a comforting word. Makes one think of Rapallo or Estoril. But substitute the word death and it doesn't sound nice any more. You

don't think of Estoril but of coffins and then you're frightened out of your wits. Don't interrupt me, I haven't finished. You aren't frightened because death is meaningless to you and means nothing to your healthy body. But I'm a sick man and I tell you, David, that I'm afraid. I am sad and afraid."

"I wish you could sit under my tree."

"What would the tree say to me?"

"It wouldn't say anything. The whole point about that tree is that I can speak to the tree and the tree listens. It can't interrupt me. And I can talk to the tree, but I can't talk to people."

"Your tree wouldn't help me. If I had to do all the talking things would be even worse. In that case I might frighten myself into immediate death." He thought it was time for boisterous laughter, but changed his mind. "There you are," he said; and then he added, "We're having a real emotional bout."

"You have only death to grapple with," McKenna said and it was his turn to lean forward. "You have only death to grapple with but I have to grapple with life. Life and I don't get on together. I always wanted to be a hero. If I had lived six hundred years ago I could have tortured my body, if I had lived a hundred years ago I could have stood in a red tunic in the middle of a fight experiencing the glory of courage and sacrifice. All I can do to-day is to sit under a bally tree and try to persuade myself that I'm the master of my soul which I haven't really discovered."

"Now I know why you resigned your commission."

That moment the telephone rang. It rang stupidly, indifferently, completely unaware of the workings of the human soul, not caring a damn for fear, love and death. McKenna did not listen but now and then a word or so floated towards him, and apparently Alastair was talking to the chairman of the local Conservative Association and it was all about a by-election, and then Alastair put down the receiver and talked of the Conservative candidate whom he did not like, but he was a Tory, so he would support him.

"I must have my forty winks," he said. "My doctors say a short afternoon nap conserves one's strength. I'll have you shown to your room and we'll meet for tea. At times one does talk a lot of tosh, doesn't one?"

The large puffy man was diffident and did not wish to meet his brother's eye, but as one has to put a full stop to a moment's real sincerity, he said, "We were of course exaggerating. The Celt always exaggerates."

"Of course," McKenna said quickly, "You will get better and I'm leading a life that most people would envy."

"How right you are. I have the best doctors in the country and after a little sleep I always feel as fit as a fiddle."

Because they were both lying they gave each other frank, straightforward smiles. Alastair went off to have his nap. McKenna potted about the house. He looked into the library but did not find a book he wanted to read. He went into the drawing room which had Louis XVI furniture and a large Pannini on one wall and a third rate Dutch still life on another wall. He went out into the snow and the air was cold and a yellowish low cloud seemed ready to shower down more snow. After a while he found his way again to the library where he took down *Dombey and Son* and settled down to read. He read for a while and he looked up and it was snowing. He went to the window and watched the snow, and after reading Dickens there was something very logical about the snow falling so noiselessly. He glanced at the fire and the flames leaped and they belonged to Dickens, too.

"I'm sorry," said a voice behind him.

He turned round and there was a tall young man of about thirty smiling at him brightly. It was one of those smiles which are often given to beggars in lieu of the traditional two coppers.

"I just walked straight in here," the young man said. "I always come to see Sir Alastair around this time."

"I'm his brother."

"How do you do? My name is Marsh. I'm Doctor Marsh. I'm your brother's country doctor."

"My brother is asleep," McKenna said and wanted to ring the bell.

"Don't wake him," Doctor Marsh said. "Let him sleep."

"Tell me, how is my brother? I haven't seen him for many years, and to be quite frank we aren't great letter writers. So his illness came rather as a surprise to me."

"He isn't very well."

"Could you be more explicit, please. I'm his brother and you may rest assured that I won't repeat it."

"Stones in the kidneys isn't such a terrible business these days. But his kidneys are in every sense in a bad way, but I won't bore you with details. Let's return to the stones." He smiled at the leaping flames. "He never bothered about them. I understand he lived rather a gay life and refused to believe that he wasn't well. It was only a year ago that he decided to go to a doctor. It was a little late. Of course he can afford the best possible treatment, we'll pack him off to Vichy again this year, but I wish he'd taken medical advice say four years ago."

Alastair had had little money and not much of a position in life. He was supposed to read for the Bar but he had chucked it and went

into a firm of wine merchants in Edinburgh. He made a little money but he had no responsibilities and life was sweet in the local, and he was a good looker, and if he was short of money his younger brother sent him enough to have a worryless good time for at least three months. Now and then he must have felt ill but life was so unimportant in such a hand-to-mouth existence, that he could not be bothered to give a guinea to a doctor, especially as there were not many guineas and for a guinea you could almost buy two bottles of whisky. But then it all changed. The title and the estate fell into his lap and now life was worth while, you could not let it escape you. But it already was too late. McKenna nodded, for he saw it so clearly.

"How long will he live?" he asked.

"That depends. But if he looks after himself and if he is lucky he can go on for a considerable time."

"Couldn't one operate on him?"

"We are past that stage. You see he waited too long. But cheer up sir, he might be alive in thirty years' time."

"I hope so."

Then Alastair came in and he looked younger, and McKenna thought that since he had exaggerated after luncheon, his brother must have done the same. Besides, doctors were pessimistic creatures. Alastair and the doctor went out after tea, but the doctor did not stay long with him, and when he came back Alastair said, "Why don't you take my brother to the pub and give him a drink? Go, David, and have a good time. Be back at seven thirty. We dine at seven thirty." So McKenna departed with the doctor. As they got into the doctor's car the doctor said, "Come to my cottage and have a drink."

"That's very kind of you."

As they drove along the doctor explained that his job with Alastair was a rather secondary job. Alastair went to eminent men in Harley Street and he, Doctor Marsh, was but the local practitioner who came over daily to see how Alastair was getting on. "I'm very small fry where he is concerned," the doctor said. "But I don't care, you see I haven't any real ambitions."

"Haven't you?"

"No, I want to concentrate more on happiness than on outward success."

"But isn't what you call outward success an integral part of life?"

"It isn't. I want to be happy."

"Like the man without a shirt?"

"Precisely. And I shall be happy. I am happy."

"You're a lucky man," McKenna said drily.

They had reached the village. The doctor's cottage stood at the edge of the village. As a matter of fact it was a comparatively large house, but, thought McKenna, happiness dwells more easily in cottages than in houses. He was beginning to regret that he had come out. The ground was white with silent snow, and the doctor whistled a popular tune, and he let him in through the front door.

"This way," he said and they went into a room which was the kind of sitting room you expect to see in a comfortable house on the outskirts of a village. Chintzes and deep chairs, and a Welsh dresser with Delft plates and a few water colours on the wall. "This is my sister," the doctor said. She had black hair and limpid black eyes and if you talked to her you imagined that her eyes would answer you instead of the voice. There was no resemblance between brother and sister. Her name was Muriel, she had a fine mouth but it was a little crooked and that gave her face an outlandish charm. You would have liked to believe that she hailed from Granada.

"My sister keeps house for me," the doctor said.

"I think I've heard that before," she said, and though she did not succeed in keeping the annoyance out of her voice, she tried to smile sweetly.

"In two years' time I'm going to get married," the doctor said. "One has to share one's life with somebody, besides a humble doctor like me should have a wife. And kiddies. Kiddies are the great thing." He rocked himself to and fro as if there were a kiddy in his arms. "I forgot to introduce you," he went on, "This is Mr. McKenna, Sir Alastair's brother."

He found a bottle of whisky and poured out three drinks, carefully, and his measure was a strict one. Three singles, and no more. Then he asked McKenna where he lived and McKenna said he lived in Kenya.

"Kenya," the sister said and she said that word as if it were of velvet.

"Do you know Kenya?" McKenna asked.

"No," she said, "but I wish I knew Kenya. It sounds so wonderful."

"It is a fine country."

"I don't care whether it's fine or not but I'm sure it isn't as humdrum as living half way between Stevenage and Baldock and doing the same thing every day."

"Muriel is a bit of a romantic," the doctor said filling his pipe.

"That's one way of putting it," his sister said.

McKenna felt uncomfortable, so he said quickly, "What a nice log fire you have."

"A log fire makes you feel at home," the doctor said with a good deal of self satisfaction.

"Are you staying in England a long time?" Muriel asked.

"Not a long time."

"How I envy you. It must be real bliss to watch this ant-heap and to know you don't belong to it and you can leave it when you will."

"But any country you live in and belong to becomes an ant-heap and you're one of the ants," McKenna said.

A fat maid poked her head in and said the doctor was wanted in the dispensary.

"There you are," the doctor said gaily. "No peace for the wicked. But one must never complain."

He went out of the room and McKenna saw that Muriel was blushing. But the moment the door closed the blush disappeared.

"As you've heard my brother is getting married in two years' time," she said turning her large eyes on McKenna. "I suppose you wonder who his fiancée or rather his bride to be is."

He smiled a non-committal smile.

"He doesn't know her," Muriel went on.

"What do you mean?"

"It's very simple. My brother has worked it out that for the good of his soul he should marry at the age of thirty-two. That's that. He isn't in love, he doesn't bother to think of the unknown person he needs for his happiness. You see she doesn't come into it at all. He'll pick her up when the time comes. It is better to marry than to burn. I can promise you my brother won't burn. Maybe she will."

"I think that's extremely funny."

"Yes, but only for an outsider. Here he comes."

Her brother returned and he showed no sign of offering another drink. After a while McKenna said, "May I ring up my brother and ask him to send a car to fetch me?"

It was amusing to think of Alastair sending a car for anybody; but Alastair was now a pillar of society; and poor Alastair he was so sick. When the car arrived he was still thinking of Alastair the sick man, and as Muriel saw him off he asked in a conspiratorial whisper, "Is your brother a good doctor?"

"He's a crashing bore but he's a damned good doctor."

Driving back to his brother he was sorry for his indiscreet question. It had established a bond between him and the girl who should have come from Granada. Alastair was in good form during dinner. They dined on fricassé of chicken and McKenna drank a glass of pale ale. They talked of their sister Louisa and of people they used to know, and of politics and other impersonal matters. Both brothers

remained well ensconced behind their individual hedges but after dinner Alastair said, "You'll stay for some time. Please do."

"I'll stay longer than you want me to."

(III)

The horizon was a straight white line illuminated by the March sun that had no chance to penetrate through the dome of clouds overhead. McKenna sat in his brother's library and it was just after breakfast. A letter had arrived from Gloria. It was written on blue note paper and her handwriting though not without elegance was angular like that of a very young girl who has not yet had the opportunity to develop it. The letter was written on four pages, and you felt that she had not enough news to fill in four pages, but the simple trick of writing in large letters had solved the problem.

She said she was back on the farm but McKenna knew that from Eric who, on the other hand, wrote every week and gave him precise information as befits a conscientious factotum. She went on to say that she was grateful and would be grateful all her life. She was his debtor and he might rest assured that she would never forget her debt. She wrote in that vein for three pages. On the fourth she became more human and spoke of her loneliness and praised Betty for either coming to see her or asking her over. Young Eric was kind too: he helped her with farm problems. It was still hot but the rainy season should not be far off. In a postscript (it was typical of Gloria to add a postscript) she said that Betty believed that she had seen little Davy smile. Two exclamation marks followed and that was the end of the letter.

It seemed to McKenna that Betty had exaggerated. At such an early age a child could surely not smile. Besides, it had no reason to smile. But that was nonsense, sheer nonsense. Nevertheless it was rather disturbing. To come out of utter darkness and then to smile. It was a pretentious thing to do; or perhaps it was a sign of infinite humility. "I think I'm a very ignorant person," he said aloud, and then he wished that it had been Gloria herself who had noticed that first smile.

He got up and went to the window and looked out. The line of the horizon was still bright with the light that had been meant to come overhead. He returned to his chair and picked up another letter. It was from Laborde. Laborde had an old typewriter which he had bought from a farmer with literary ambitions who went broke. Laborde typed his letters with two fingers and used very thin typing

paper which he crumpled before putting into the envelope, so the reading was not easy.

"I miss you badly," Laborde wrote. "Now and again I go to see Adams but I don't get on with him when you aren't with us. He isn't a *tête-à-tête* companion. He is very drunk these days. The other day I went to the township and the D.C. asked me to stay for lunch. Very civil of him and I was bored stiff. I saw Betty Newton and she was as nice as pie to me. She used not to be civil in the old days and you know there isn't much love lost between us. She asked me to lunch. I nearly fainted. Gloria is back but I suppose you know that. . . ."

The letter rambled on but McKenna could not finish it, for the butler came to tell him that Miss Marsh was there to see him. McKenna went out into the hall. Muriel Marsh smiled at him as you smile at an intimate acquaintance. They had met about four or five times but McKenna had no more secrets to share with her.

"I'm going to have a wonderful day to-day," she said as she came nearer to him. It was her habit to stand very near when she spoke. "My brother, driven by a generous impulse I can't quite understand, has lent me his car for the day. I'm going up to town. Not to shop as my sex usually does but to be away for a day from the smug little world round here. I was wondering if you'd like to go up too. I could give you a lift." Her eyes met his and if the pretext was flimsy, the eyes at any rate were truthful.

"I didn't actually think of . . ." he began but the eyes did not leave his. "It's very good of you. As a matter of fact I'd love to go up. Thank you very much. I have to buy some books for a friend in Kenya. I'll go and get my coat."

The eyes were triumphant and they made no secret of their victory.

He went to Alastair's study and told him that he was going up to London with Muriel. He spoke diffidently because away from her it seemed silly and unnecessary to go up to town.

"Have a good time," Alastair said. "If the sun comes out I'll go for a walk. I think a little walk would do me good."

"I'm sure it would."

She was waiting for him in the car. It was an Austin Seven. She talked eighteen to the dozen and he listened courteously. The Great North Road was teeming with thundering lorries.

"They look like big beasts without brains," she said. Then she said, "Yesterday I tidied my brother's desk. It's a very painstaking job. You have to put everything in its appointed place. That, of course, includes the Flanders poppy."

"The Flanders poppy?"

"Yes. My brother bought a Flanders poppy several years ago. It was, as you may guess, Armistice Day and the seller must have cornered him. Anyway, he kept that poppy and wears it every Armistice Day. Saves him from buying another. For sixpence he spent years ago he can face all the Armistice Days to come. That's what people like you fought for."

"I think your brother is an amazing person."

"You're a very tolerant person."

The car was crawling behind an L.N.E.R. van.

"How I understand the urge that drove you out to Kenya," she said. "I hate industrialisation."

"It wasn't an urge," he said.

"Then what was it?"

"I don't know. Tell me and you can talk candidly to me, what does your brother really think of the state of my brother's health."

"He doesn't talk about him to me."

She was disappointed. The intimate personal conversation was not to be. But she was no fool and she took the hint that was not actually given and talked of matters of only general interest. As they entered London she asked, "Where shall I pick you up this afternoon?"

"Could you lunch with me?"

She said, yes, eagerly and her spirits revived. They parted at the corner of Shaftesbury Avenue and Cambridge Circus and he said he would meet her at the Savoy Grill for luncheon. She was impressed by the thought of feeding at the Savoy. He did not know what to do with himself till lunch time, so he walked down the Avenue, then down Piccadilly and turned into the park. He walked for a while, then he sat down on a bench. He sat quietly looking at the wintry landscape. He liked the bare trees and the weak colours. Such a contrast to the garishness of the East. He was quite unaware of the gaunt figure that had sat down beside him. But after a few minutes the gaunt man spoke.

"Not a nice morning after all."

He was a tall person with a small yet drooping moustache. He was neither shabby nor prosperous looking. He must have been a soldier or a policeman in his time, for there was a certain amount of trimness about him. But only what was left from the past. "Not a nice morning after all," he said again.

"No, it isn't," McKenna said and waited for the man to ask him if he could oblige him with a match. A little later he would surely tell him a sob story and the whole thing would cost him a shilling. However, he noticed that the shoes were well polished.

"I don't like winter," the man said. "Makes one feel old, sir."

He took out a large handkerchief and blew his nose, one nostril at a time, and he wiped his nose and moustache carefully.

"Summer is a different matter," he continued. "I know our dear English summer lets one down, but still it is summer and so one doesn't feel depressed."

McKenna was well aware that the word dear must have cost the man an effort.

"In fact," the man said, "in summer one feels cheerful." He took out his handkerchief and wiped his moustache again. He sighed and decided to abandon the all absorbing topic of the weather and the seasons. "I wonder," he said, "if I could interest you, sir, in a very original gadget."

McKenna was not surprised. The man took out a little box from his pocket and put it on McKenna's lap. "It's a patented powder to clean golf clubs. But there is this gadget." He took out the gadget. It looked like a large tie clip. "You clip the rag to it and so you don't dirty your hands. It's only three and nine and we throw the patented powder in." He spoke generously.

"I don't play golf," McKenna said.

"You have a good figure sir, so you don't need to play golf," the man said and put the gadget back into his pocket. "But I might interest you in something else. Have you any children."

"I'm afraid I haven't."

"But you have nephews and nieces and I bet you're the godfather of a few. And your friends have kids too. Just look at this, sir. It's highly technical and efficient."

From another pocket he took a toy. It was a racing car and a monkey sat at the wheel. The racing car was elegantly elongated, but the monkey was stodgy and too large for it.

"Just watch it move, sir," the man said.

He wound up the racer, put it on the ground and it ran off briskly with the monkey towering above. "A fine toy," the man said. He caught the car and held it in front of McKenna.

"I can see in your kindly eyes," the man said quickly, parrot-like, "that you're thinking of your little favourite among the little toddlers you know." He was glad when he reached the end of the sentence.

"How much is it?" McKenna asked.

"Seven and eight, sir. Cheap at the price."

A boy of about seven had stopped and was watching McKenna take out a ten shilling note.

"I haven't any change sir," the man said. "I don't believe in carrying change about. One loses change very easily."

The boy of seven gave McKenna a worldly-wise look. McKenna

handed the man the ten shilling note and said, "Don't bother about the change."

"You're what we used to call out in the East a pukka sahib," the man said.

"Were you out in the East?" He had wanted to go and the question came out inadvertently.

"Was I in the East? Twelve years in India."

"Were you in the Army?"

The worldly-wise boy of seven was smiling broadly.

"Was I in the Army? Twenty-two years."

"Where were you in India?"

"Madras Sappers and Miners, sir."

"So was I." McKenna said and took out a pound note and gave it to him. "Good-bye, good luck."

As he left the man jumped up and stood to attention and saluted. When McKenna was out of earshot the boy said to him in his worldly-wise fashion, "'Ow d'yer know he was an officer?"

"You bloody little bastard," the man said.

McKenna went into a bookshop on his way to the Savoy. He gave a grave attendant the list of books Adams had compiled. The attendant examined the list. "Here is the address," McKenna said. "I want the books to be posted as soon as possible."

The attendant lifted his eyebrow. "Fancy," he said, "I thought they were meant for several people. Such a variety of subjects. But I suppose the gentleman in question wants to give them away as presents."

"No, he wants to read them."

The eyebrows remained lifted, and McKenna hailed a taxi and when he arrived at the Savoy Muriel was already there.

"I always come too early," she said. "I'm always afraid I'm going to be late."

He took her into lunch and she talked to him brightly and he admitted to himself that she was as good a luncheon companion as one could desire. She looked pretty. Her looks were rather capricious. He had seen her look plain but now in the Savoy Grill she was extremely pretty.

"You," she said suddenly, "are a man of the world and I'm certain that you consider me a little middle-class creature."

"But I'm not a man of the world."

"Oh yes, you are."

He shook his head and asked her if she wanted a liqueur. She said a Grand Marnier and gave him a quick glance afraid lest she might have said the wrong thing.

"I wish you'd talk about yourself," she said when the liqueurs arrived. "You are a mysterious man. I know that sounds hackneyed, but you are mysterious."

"Not at all."

"Why do you say that? You know you aren't telling the truth."

"There is nothing I could wish more than to seem interesting."

"It seems," she said with an engaging smile, "that I'll never get to the truth."

She thanked him for the luncheon and said that she had enjoyed herself very much. They came out into the lounge of the grill room and as an attendant helped him on with his coat the toy fell out, and owing to the hazards of mechanical toys, the racer shot along on the carpet and the monkey wobbled triumphantly, obesely. A woman thought it was a rat and the page ran after it. It caused a good deal of commotion and the racer only came to a halt when it collided with the foot of a film magnate. It turned over and its wheels, happy and free, turned round rapidly. Unperturbed, the film magnate continued on his progress to the grill room. McKenna was red in the face.

"Pick it up," he said to the page.

The page picked it up and his bulging eyes caressing the monkey he brought it to McKenna. "Your toy, sir," he said.

Now that it had been proved beyond a doubt that it was not a rat, there was plenty of giggling and laughing. McKenna put the toy into his pocket. Muriel was standing not far from him and he grinned at her sheepishly. She was pale and he believed that she must have thought too that it was a rat. As a matter of fact he would have preferred it to be a rat, for then people would have thought that he was either an eccentric or a breeder of tame rats, or completely mad, but now they were convinced that he was just a fatuous old uncle. He went up to her and as they left he said, "How frightfully stupid."

She did not answer. They got into the car and as they came into the traffic of the Strand she said, "I didn't know you had any children."

"I haven't any children."

"Then why did you buy it?"

"I bought it for my godson."

"I see. Where is your godson?"

"He's out in Kenya."

"And you buy him a toy seven thousand miles away?"

"It looks like it, doesn't it?"

"You must be very fond of him."

"I'm not fond of him but I'm very sorry for him. I have seen him only four times but funnily enough he always comes back to my thoughts. He seems to haunt me."

"Does he haunt you because your conscience is rather worrying you?"

He did not understand what she was driving at. "It isn't that," he said. "I suppose it's because I've never seen such a small child before. It's very complicated." He looked at Bush House and then turned back to her. "There appears all of a sudden a new being in this world. It will live to be sixty or seventy, or it might die young, anyway, it's going to influence many people, interfere with their plans and habits and nobody can stop it and it just goes on and on and on. I'm talking rubbish."

"You're not," she said in an intense voice.

"The father of that child was a friend of mine. I haven't many friends and so I believe in friendship. The father died the day the child was born. I feel it is my duty to help that child. But for the life of me I don't know how to help it. I can give him money but life isn't money."

Muriel brushed her shoulder against him. "Please forgive me," she said. "I had such nasty thoughts." She laughed a short hysterical laugh. "Give him that toy you had the courage to put back into your pocket at the Savoy. He can't ask for more. I tell you he can't ask for more. To carry a toy seven thousand miles. He can't ask for more."

(IV)

It was the night before his departure for Kenya and he walked over to the doctor's house to say good-bye to Muriel. It was the beginning of June and it was warm and that pleased the strawberries. The stars popped out with gentle brightness and the moon was in her second quarter. The lane was quiet and McKenna saw a light in the dispensary. So the doctor was busy, but the light went out before he reached the front door. He rang the bell and the maid opened the door for him. The doctor was filling his pipe and his hands were conspicuously clean, for he had just scrubbed them. Muriel was reading.

"So you've come to say good-bye," the doctor said.

"Of course he has come to say good-bye," Muriel said in a bright voice. Everything was bright about her to-night, especially the eyes.

"Well," said the doctor, "the Empire builder is returning to his lonely outpost to carry the white man's burden."

"My brother," Muriel said, "once saw that play *Rain* and he has read *Kim* as a boy, so he knows exactly what life is like in the tropics."

The doctor had the habit of not reacting to his sister's remarks. "And when will you be back with us?" he asked.

"I don't know, perhaps never."

"Next time you come over here you must look me up. I'll be a married man by then and the house will be full of the laughter of little tots."

"But I bet you won't buy them motor cars with monkeys in them," Muriel said.

"I hope, major," the doctor said, "that you'll have a pleasant passage out to Kenya. What about a little drink?"

It was a little drink. When the time came to leave, the doctor accompanied McKenna to the door and McKenna said, "I wish you all the luck in the world in your quest for happiness."

"Quest? I've found it."

There was nothing to answer to that. "You'll look after my brother, won't you?"

"You may rest assured," the doctor said in his professional voice which was much more likeable.

McKenna began to walk away from the house. He heard footsteps and it was Muriel running after him.

"May I go up to London to-morrow and see you off?" She was panting a bit. She was not given to brisk exercise.

"But it will be so boring."

"It won't be boring. Please let me."

"I'm going up on the 8.48."

"I'll be at the station."

She turned away and he walked on. His brother Alastair was in a good mood during dinner. He drank two glasses of Vichy water and ate Œufs Florentins. "Tell the cook," he said to the butler, "that next time she must put less cheese into it. Cheese is indigestible." He whispered to his brother, "I'm getting rid of the cook. I'm getting a chef. He knows all about dieting." And in utter sharp fury he banged his fist on the table. "Sorry, David, but it's great to have money."

After dinner they went to the library. "So you're going. I wish I could have persuaded you to sell out in Kenya and to come and live here." He crossed his legs. "What are you going to do with this place after I die?"

"Please don't talk nonsense. You'll live another fifty years."

"I won't and you know as well as I, old boy, that I won't. What are you going to do with this house? It's a nice house."

"Why don't you leave it to Louisa's children?"

"No, I want to leave it to you."

"That's very kind of you."

"Kindness be blown. It's funny, David, that we never got on and now we get on so well. You came here for a day and you stayed for months. I'm very glad."

"I've enjoyed my stay."

"I loved having you here." He raised his voice and it was full of bitterness. "I wish to Almighty God that I had never got this bloody title and I wish I could still be in Edinburgh, poor but having life in here." He opened his fists. Then he became calm. "There is nothing one can do. As you know I go to Mass every Sunday and I feel happy in Church and when I come back the whole thing comes back to me. No, there is nothing one can do. At any rate not down here. But when you get back to Kenya go and ask your tree what a dying man should do to have courage."

Since McKenna was leaving comparatively early they said goodbye before going to bed.

"God bless you," Alastair said. "You old devil you, you pinched granny's money from the rest of us."

He tried to chuckle and then hurried out of the room. McKenna stood before the closed door and then he too went to bed.

Gloria had written him three letters. The last one had arrived two days ago. She was still grateful, very grateful. She gave more details of the baby. She said that everybody was of the opinion that it was a happy and contented baby. Its hair was growing and one could see that the eyebrows were already a stencilled line. The letter made him feel that before sitting down to write she went to the cot and had a good look at the child. And the rains had missed the district. But Laborde and especially Eric had given all the details and seven thousand miles from Kenya he was as worried about it as they were. For that meant that a drought was in store for them. He wanted to be gone. He was impatient and he wished he could walk out through the bedroom door and walk into his house on the farm. But one must not be impatient; moreover, Eric had said in his last letter that there was still plenty of grass, though it was pretty yellow. He went to bed and read a page of *Dombey and Son* and put the light out.

Muriel was waiting for him at Stevenage station. "Oh, here you are," she said and she did not smile. The train arrived and they found a first-class compartment completely empty. She did not sit down opposite him but sat down beside him. The train pulled out.

"I have so much to say to you," she said, "but first of all promise me you'll never write to me."

"But why shouldn't I?"

"Because I want to remember you, only remember you. There won't be any more you, there will be only memory. That's all I want because that's all I can get." He did not know what to answer. "Don't be afraid," she said, "I won't rape you."

She laughed and afterwards she patted his hand and said, "You know, don't you, that you're a very lovable man."

"Am I?" he asked and because he would not have to write to her he said, "You ought to have asked my wife."

"Your wife?"

"Yes, I was married. She left me."

"The damned fool."

"I don't know about that. I didn't like her leaving me. She enjoyed leaving me."

"And I'd give my life . . ." she said but did not finish her sentence.

"I'm quite an impossible person," McKenna said quickly. "You only knew me here on a holiday, but in my normal everyday life I'm worse than your brother and I haven't even the excuse of being a prig like him."

"I don't mind," she said. She asked him for a cigarette and she inhaled the first puff as though it were the last thing she would ever do. "Anyway, I don't come into it. But I'm terribly worried about you."

"About me?"

"Yes. I'm not afraid that a lion will eat you. You're far too tough, but I know you aren't tough within you and I have a feeling that there is a lot of suffering in store for you. You'll go through an awful time. And I won't be able to help you. That's so terrible. I won't be able to help you." She began to cry and she cried lightly and did not wipe away her tears. McKenna had an urgent desire based on compassion to take her hand and ask her to go with him, not because he was afraid of the fate in store for him, but because he was sorry for her and felt ill at ease.

"Please kiss me," she said. "Please."

So he kissed her and liked it while he kissed her but when he had finished kissing her he liked that just as much. The train arrived at Hatfield and a fine figure of a business man got in and their conversation became commonplace and once she laughed for no reason whatever and then they arrived at King's Cross. They took a taxi to Victoria and there were but a few precious moments left for her.

"David," she said, taking his hand, "I'm so worried about you. You have nothing and nobody. David, you're the finest man I ever met."

"I shall never forget you," he said and saw the red dust rising and

the night with a hyrax groaning in the distance. "You're very sweet," he said and there were the bulls going down to the dip.

"I am sweet," she said, "but what does that matter? But listen David, you have nobody and nothing. Don't give that toy to that child. Keep it, play with it and then perhaps you won't be so lonely."

The taxi had stopped and a porter was opening the door. She took McKenna's hand and kissed it.

"Leave me here in the taxi," she said. "But keep that toy. You must keep something."

PART THREE

(I)

"AND THEN," SAID GLORIA, "THAT AWFUL MAN from Nairobi looked round and said why didn't I sell the ponies. To sell Kiwi!"

Kiwi, the Somali pony, walked on and gave a pig hole a wide berth.

"What happened then?" Betty asked. She was mounted on her country bred chestnut gelding and thus her voice came from above.

"What could I do?" Gloria said. "I gave him fifty pounds."

"At the present rate there won't be much left of the money David gave you."

"I know, darling, but I don't want them to throw dirt at Miles's memory."

Betty sighed. She was deeply attached to Gloria but the continuous harping on the dead Miles annoyed her. It was meet and proper to weep for the dead: however, only for the prescribed period. The prescribed period had passed. Good gracious, this was June. Miles had been dead for five long months and the rains had not come and they were in for a drought.

"God knows what I'll do when I have spent that thousand," Gloria said.

"Doesn't the farm bring in anything?"

"Things were in such a muddle when Miles died. You know we haven't much cattle, still, I'm going to sell some bullocks. But they're six years old. They should have been sold when they were three or four. Miles must have overlooked their age, or perhaps, poor darling, he had other plans."

"I bet he had," Betty said drily.

"Doesn't that p.g. of yours know anything about farming," she asked a little later.

"Don't talk to me about him."

She disliked her paying guest but she had to put up with him. When she returned to her house the neighbours and the neighbours' neighbours were of the unanimous opinion that a white woman should not live alone on a farm. Gloria pooh-poohed the idea, though even the D.C. was of the opinion that she should not stay alone. She could not afford to take on a manager and she refused to go and live with Betty or the many other kind souls who suggested she should live with them. She was obstinate and sad, and she would not desert

Miles's farm. Eventually the problem solved itself by somebody finding her a paying guest, a young man who wished to study farming in Kenya and was, therefore, willing to come as a pupil.

His name was Monkhouse and he was a dour person. His only ambition was to pick up all there was to be picked up about cattle and cattle disease and other matters related to cattle farming in the Highlands of Kenya. He was the son of a Yorkshire farmer and he had a few thousand pounds and he believed that in a new country there was a better opening for him. Kenya as such meant little to him. He disliked the free and easy life of the colony. He was a beefy young individual, cocksure and he never argued: he just laid down the law. He had been on another farm for six months and came to Gloria, as it were, in order to experiment. He had a poor opinion of her, which did not stop him from taking all the advantages he could of her ignorance. If a cow was dying of gall sickness he did nothing about it, for he wanted to see what the insides of a cow that died of gall sickness looked like. So he gleefully waited for the inevitable and then post-mortemed the cow and thus his knowledge improved.

After staying with her for three months he thought there was no reason to stay on; but as he knew that she was more than hard up he hoped she might sell out to him. Moreover, there always was a chance of East Coast Fever breaking out on the farm and that was a disease he wished to acquaint himself with.

"I hate him," Gloria said, "but he pays me ten pounds a month and who am I, darling, to say no to ten pounds a month?"

She gave Betty her frank luminous smile.

"Where the hell is McKenna?" Betty asked petulantly.

"He should be back, shouldn't he?"

"I hope to God he didn't pick up a woman,"

"Who cares?"

Betty made an impatient gesture.

"I don't think," Gloria went on with a girlish giggle, "that any woman would want to pick him up."

"He's a rich man. Anyway, when he comes back you must tell him that you're at your wits' end."

"I couldn't do that," Gloria said seriously. "He's been very good to me. I can't do it." She thought a little. "And I'm afraid of him. He's like a schoolmaster."

"You're a fool," Betty said. "I want my tea."

Betty's countrybred was faster than the Somali pony. Betty reached the house before Gloria. The house was on the top of the ridge and the long, sad plain was like a yellow carpet that had been put to too much use. Betty dismounted and shouted, "Boy," and

Gloria's syce came and took the horse away. Betty did not wait for Gloria but started to walk towards the verandah. Outside the verandah there stood six natives. Kikuyu squatters all of them and they looked at her and muttered a half shy, half disinterested jambo and they continued to wait for Gloria. Betty went past them and mounted the two steps that led to the verandah. In the corner stood the pram and the baby was howling. The native in charge of the baby was nowhere. Betty lifted the baby out of the pram and the baby stopped howling. This child ought to be washed she said to herself and took it into the bathroom.

The baby was pale and very thin. It opened its mouth and she imagined that it would smile. She was proud of the fact that she had discovered the first smile. However the baby had not opened its mouth in order to smile. It was hungry and it began to howl again. In the bathroom which had a window opening on to the compound she could hear a native saying to Gloria, "Shauri baia sana, memsahib." Shortly after Gloria called her.

"I'm in the bathroom," Betty said.

Gloria came into the bathroom, "An amazing story," she said.

"Kichuki, the house boy, has pinched a couple of cakes of scented soap from Monkhouse. Serves Monkhouse damned well right. With that soap he has bought the love of all those boys' wives." She laughed and when Betty thought she would stop laughing she burst out even louder.

"I hope you'll give him the sack," Betty said loudly, though the laughter almost drowned her loud voice. She had undressed the baby and began to wash it.

"Nothing of the sort," Gloria said. "He's a good servant. I'm going to fix this shauri up. You wait."

She left the bathroom and Betty muttered to herself and then she finished washing the baby and took the baby to the nursery which used to be Miles's study cum office. She put a clean vest on the baby and found a clean nappie and she heated the milk on the spirit stove. Once she looked up and caught sight of an enlarged snapshot and there was Miles with one foot on a shot buffalo and he was resolute and proud.

"You sap, you," she said and turned back to the baby. "Give me a smile, darling."

Outside there was a continuous drone of voices: only Gloria's voice stood out. She was good with natives. She understood their way of thinking and Betty had often heard her praise herself in that respect. After half an hour or so she came in. The baby had drunk

its bottle and was sleeping on Betty's knees. "You look like the Madonna and Child," Gloria said.

"I'm not the Madonna," Betty said and because she was firmly resolved to have a row with Gloria, she was biding her time.

"It's all fixed up," Gloria said. She sat down and crossed her legs. They were both wearing jodhpores but Gloria's legs were like the legs of a tall young man with a lithe body. "Kichuki's father was called in and now Kichuki has to build four new huts for the four cuckolds and give them each two sheep and three goats. Now everybody is happy and satisfied. What about tea? Let's have it on the verandah. Bring the child. I see you've fed him. You're sweet."

Betty said nothing and they went out on to the verandah and Betty put the child back into the pram. She put the mosquito net over it and turned to Gloria.

"The net is filthy. You'd better have it washed. And why was there nobody looking after the child?"

"Now be reasonable, darling. I was out only for two hours. I told the boy who looks after him that he should look at him now and then and see if he needs anything."

"But the boy wasn't here."

"Probably he had a peep at him just before we arrived. A child of that age wants very little."

"It wants love and that's more than you give it." Betty was honest-to-God angry. She would not have been angry if Gloria had been a man. She expected little from men. Her relationship to man's ability was the same as Doctor Johnson's to the performing dogs. But a woman was a different matter; Gloria was letting her and her sex down.

"You exaggerate, darling," Gloria said. "Nobody can say I don't do my duty."

"I'm not speaking of duty. You know what I'm speaking of."

"No, I don't. Please don't be horrid to me." She went up to Betty and put both hands on Betty's shoulders. "You know how wretched I am, you know I'm nearly mad with worry. Please don't be horrid to me."

"You have a child and you should be proud of it."

Gloria felt like asking her why she had not a child; but she did not want to annoy Betty, so she said, "I wish to God I could afford a nanny for it. But you know how broke I am."

In order to placate Betty she pulled the pram to the table and she sat down beside Betty and for a time moved the pram backward and forward, gently, obediently, till she forgot the pram. By then

Betty was mollified. They drank tea and ate cucumber sandwiches. The cucumber came from the vegetable garden beside the swamp.

"What surprises me," Gloria said suddenly, "is how well you know how to feed a child." She remembered the pram and began to push it forward and backward.

"I suppose it's instinct and common sense," Betty said. "But I'm worried about this child."

"Oh, please darling don't start again."

Betty could not start again: Monkhouse came in. He was wearing Wellingtons and as he had been to the boma they were caked with dung. He had a low forehead and a dull expression. His pale eyes protruded and he considered himself the best type of yeoman farmer.

"I hear there was trouble with the shenzies," he said. Shenzi, a derogative word, was one of the first he had picked up. "They pinched my soap."

"I've fixed it all up."

"Kichuki will have to give me two bob," Monkhouse said.

"I didn't tell him that," Gloria said.

"Then I'd better tell him."

Gloria bit her lip. "As a matter of fact," she said, "I've fixed the whole thing up." She told him what had taken place outside the verandah.

"I don't think much of that," Monkhouse said. "You shouldn't encourage their stupid meaningless customs."

"Look here, Mr. Monkhouse, I've lived in this country for years and years and I know what's the right thing to do."

"Now don't heat up, you'll boil over."

Having said that he went and sat down in a deck chair and began to fill his pipe. On his way, quite inadvertently, he trod on the dachshund's tail and the dachshund yelled, then went to his mistress to be comforted.

"You poor darling Hansi," Gloria cooed. "Big nasty. . . ."

"Ten pounds a month," hissed Betty under her breath. Then in her normal voice she said, "Reggie is driving over for dinner, but I told him I'm going to stay the night. I told him to bring over some food. We don't want to sponge on you."

"You never sponge on me," Gloria said.

Monkhouse had filled his pipe. He turned to Betty and said, "Mrs. Newton, next week I'll come over to your place and I'll have a look at that Frisian bull of yours. I want to go quietly, you know, before I decide to buy a farm." He gave Gloria a swift look. "I want to make up my mind what breed of cattle I'm going to go in

for. But quietly." He was very pleased with himself. Even the way he held the match to the pipe gave it away.

"Good God," Gloria exclaimed. "It's David."

Accompanied by the basset hound McKenna was walking towards the house.

"Go and run to him, you fool," Betty whispered. "Get up, run."

Gloria rose and left the verandah and walked briskly up to McKenna.

"What a surprise," she said and because she felt Betty's eyes on her she added, "What a wonderful surprise. I'm so glad to see you. You look very fit."

McKenna shook her hand. "You look very well," he said.

"When did you arrive?"

"I arrived this morning, so I thought I'd come over and see how you're getting on. I hope everything is all right."

"Everything is splendid. Thanks to you, David."

He gently shook his head. When they reached the verandah Betty asked, "Where have you been all this time?"

"My brother wasn't feeling well so I stayed longer than I expected."

"The eternal Samaritan," Betty said and he blushed and she enjoyed that.

"David," Gloria said, "this is Mr. Monkhouse, my p.g. I don't dare to call him my pupil as he professes to know so much more than I."

"You're the bloke with the Shorthorns," Monkhouse said.

"Yes, I have Shorthorns," McKenna said.

Oh, thought Gloria, if he were Miles he would not answer him so ineptly and civilly. Miles would have put the bounder in his place.

"David," she said in a loud jubilant voice, "come and look at your godson. Look, how he's grown." She pulled off the mosquito net and whipped the child out of the pram. The child awoke and started to cry.

"He has grown," McKenna said.

"Give your godfather a kiss and stop that horrid noise," Gloria said and added to herself: I hope Betty is satisfied. The baby stopped crying and became solemn. It focused its eyes on McKenna and then it grinned, though the cheeks were still wet with tears. Then it grinned again. Gloria never noticed it. She put the baby back into the pram and said in a solicitous voice, "It's getting cold. I'd better take him up to the nursery. You come with us, David."

She carried the child through the sitting room. Kichuki had made the fire and the light of the flames made a half circle on the floor, and as Gloria and the child entered the half circle they seemed a happy

mother and a healthy and carefree child. As they came to the nursery she said, "You know this room."

"Yes, I know it," McKenna said and he thought of the many evenings he and Miles had sat in that room, and apparently Miles had been afraid of him and thus had not dared to ask him to lend him money. Gloria deposited the child in the cot.

"You'll stay for dinner," she said.

"That's very kind of you. So the baby is well."

"Of course little Davy is well. Why do you ask that?"

"I don't know. I suppose we men know nothing about babies. But he looks so pale."

"They all look pale at that age."

"I see." He smiled diffidently. "The last time I saw him he cried and now the moment I caught sight of him he cried. They cry a lot at that age; but why?"

"It's good for their lungs," she said and leaned over the cot and began to speak baby language. It was the same language she used when talking to Hansi, the dachshund.

"But he smiled," McKenna said. She turned back to him.

"He'll be a big strong man. His mummy will see to it. Now come and let's have a drink. I'm dying for one."

They returned to the sitting room and the lights were on. Betty was sitting near the fire, her husband, who had just arrived from the club, was slightly tiddly. He welcomed McKenna effusively back to Kenya.

"Been all over the place, my dear fellow, what? Tell us all about it? Travelled back through gay Paree?"

"I was there one day."

"Only one day! Still, I do envy you chaps who can go wherever you want to." And he said a lot more and his teeth kept back at least half of his comments.

The dinner was not an hilarious affair. Monkhouse saw to that. He gave McKenna sound advice on farming and McKenna listened to him politely and Gloria wished that Miles were there, for he would have given Monkhouse a proper dressing down. She went out of her way to give them a better dinner than she could afford. She had a bottle of port, her last one, and told Kichuki to bring it in.

"We'll leave you to the port," she said and she and Betty rose and McKenna opened the door for them and Monkhouse went out with the ladies. "Early to bed," he said and in case they did not get his meaning he added, "Early to rise, makes the man. . . ." But by then he was out of the room.

"I don't like him," Reggie said, and he sat down with the determination to polish off the port.

"I wouldn't call him a likeable man," McKenna said.

"You always believed in understatements, old boy. But you Sappers are queer people." As McKenna let that pass he went on to say that he was the first person to admit that sappers knew a lot of stuff he did not know. "Mines and roads and things like that," he said.

The basset hound was sitting beside McKenna and at intervals whimpered not so much with pleasure as in memory of the lonely months he had spent far from the being he adored.

"I'll tell you one thing," Reggie said leaning forward. "Whenever I come to this house I must laugh."

"Laugh?"

"Laugh, old man. I know I'm an ogre and a ghoul. But I can't help it. You know it often happens that a woman dies when the child is born but that was the first case when the father died." He began to laugh. His teeth impeded him and so all he could produce was a sort of croaking tee-hee.

"Poor Miles," McKenna said. "And he would have made such an excellent father."

"Mother, old boy, excellent mother."

"Probably you're right," McKenna said drily.

Before McKenna left the house there was a commotion on account of a bat that had flown into the sitting room. Gloria hated and feared bats. She ran out of the room and the bat banged blindly against the wall and the Japanese prints. Eventually Reggie induced it to leave through the open door. He was good at that kind of thing.

"I can't help it," Gloria said when she came in pale and shuddering. "I fear them more than death."

That was a statement and the other three left it at that.

"I must say," Reggie said, "that I got rid of it jolly quickly."

"You hero," Betty said and she laughed and Reggie laughed with her. Gloria did not laugh.

When McKenna left he stopped outside the house and waited till the door closed, then he retraced his steps but instead of going to the verandah he went round the house and entered it through the back entrance. On the right was the nursery door. He opened it and flashed his torch carefully so as not to wake up the child. He took from his pocket the toy motor-car, complete with the podgy monkey, and put it into the cot. He felt that he was letting down Muriel Marsh for the last time. That made him smile and he had a

sharp desire to wake up the baby and make it smile. But probably it would only cry. He tiptoed out of the nursery.

The whitish, large moon was coming up and in a few minutes it was like daylight. It was, however, the daylight of the dead. Reggie would not have minded lingering on.

"They're not so frightening if you examine them at close quarters," he said.

"Who?" Gloria asked.

"Bats," he said.

"For God's sake shut up," Gloria said.

"And time for you to go home," his wife said. "I'll be back at lunch time. Don't forget that the stock inspector is coming to-morrow. And don't forget the brindle cow with the broken horn. She should be calving down at any moment."

"I won't forget," Reggie said and he was a little sad because of the twelve hours' separation before him. "A tiny kiss for a night cap," he giggled. She waited passively till he finished rubbing his lips against her cheek.

"How efficient you are, darling," sighed Gloria after Reggie had left.

"Somebody must be efficient."

"I'm going to play the gramophone," Gloria said.

She went to the gramophone and put on a record. She listened to it blissfully and then came a second record and then a third. They were all of the same period and that period was the span of time during which she had moved about in London and had met Miles and had danced with him and loved him and the world was completely hers. *Little White Lies*, *Love Parade*, *Body and Soul*, and the fourth record was Paul Whiteman and his band playing the *Song of the Dawn*. Betty yawned.

"Bedtime," she said.

"Do you mind, darling, sleeping in my room? That bat upset me so terribly. Please don't let me sleep alone."

"I'll sleep in your room."

Gloria went over to her and kissed her. Betty liked that: it was not clumsy and she had no moustache. She yawned again. Very comfortably this time.

She undressed quickly. She did not like looking into the mirror more often than necessary. She was putting on weight and she could not stop it. She was gathering it slowly, inexorably and every year meant another pound or two and then, she knew, that putting on weight would stop and the weight would consolidate itself and by then she would be ankle deep in middle age. With admiration, yet without

the slightest envy, she watched Gloria who was walking about naked in the room: she was searching for cream and talcum powder and what not. Her figure was so near to perfection that you thought it was perfection itself. She finished with cream and powder, brushed her teeth and put on her pyjamas and got into bed.

"Any man," Betty said, "would fall in love with you in a big way."

"I don't want any man."

"I know you want your dead Miles, so don't waste your breath in telling me."

"You're so cruel."

"It's high time somebody was cruel to you. You're getting deeper and deeper into the mess. And you're not exactly a chicken."

"Of course I'm not a chicken. I'm twenty-eight."

"You simply must get out of that mess."

"But how? What can I do?"

"There is, for instance, McKenna."

"What do you mean by that?"

"You know perfectly well what I mean."

"No, I don't. I love Miles and that's that."

"How boring you are. Throw me a cigarette."

"Here you are."

"You must stop drivelling about Miles. Do you think you're the only woman in the world who's lost her husband?"

Gloria said nothing and waited for Betty to go on. On the other hand Betty waited for her to answer. After a little while Gloria decided to side-track the issue.

"How do you know," she asked, "that McKenna cares a damn for me?"

"Well, if he doesn't, just walk up and down before him as you did five minutes ago."

"Darling, how dare you? Darling, you're disgusting."

Gloria blushed. She was fundamentally prudish and because she was a prude she took any indecent joke or allusion by the letter.

"All right," Betty said, "I hate to shock little girls. You're far too stupid to understand on which side your bread is buttered. All I want you to do is to behave yourself and not to make a fool of yourself. Then he'll help you."

Gloria began to arrange her pillow for the night.

"He might not go on helping you for ever," Betty went on, "but he must help the child. He must get a nurse for the child. You can get that out of him. Go round to him to-morrow and discuss the whole thing with him. Maybe he isn't as fat as Miles was, but of course that isn't his fault."

"I won't have it," Gloria shouted. "You hear, Betty, I won't have it."

"Go round to see him to-morrow," Betty went on unperturbed, "and take the baby with you. But wash it first. McKenna is a soldier and my father was a soldier and Reggie was almost a soldier, though you wouldn't believe it. Anyway, I can tell you that soldiers like cleanliness. So wash little Davy before you take him over."

"Oh, you're so mean to me," said Gloria.

Now she was crying. She was lying on her belly and she was moistening her pillow good and proper. With a suppressed sigh Betty got up and went over to her. She patted the heaving shoulders and she sat down beside the wet pillow.

"You know I want to help you," she said. "You know I'm the best friend you have."

Gloria turned round. Her eyes were shining on account of the tears. "I know I'm a fool," she said in a small voice, "but please don't say such awful things about Miles. He wasn't fat."

"Oh," said Betty and she felt cheated. "Now, dry your tears," she said in a less friendly voice. "We'll talk to-morrow."

She returned to her bed. The hyenas were in particularly good form. They hooted as though the night belonged to them. Probably it did. But above, or rather below that hooting Betty discerned another sound. "Your child is crying," she said. "I think it's your turn to go and look after him."

Gloria jumped out of bed and hurried to the door. She turned back before going out and blew Betty a kiss.

"What would I do without you?" she said; and Betty went to sleep loving Gloria.

(II)

The fig tree was innocent of shadow. The vertical heat sat on the red dust of the compound: it was like a carpet held down by four weights in its four corners. In the kitchen the cook, who was a Mission boy, was reading out loud the Swahili translation of the Bible. He read it in the unctuous voice he had acquired at the American Methodist Mission. He listened to his own voice imitating the missionary, and that gave him more pleasure than the text of the Scriptures. The cook had a club foot and the other boys who mostly believed in that obscure yet powerful breaker of white man's china and glasses, in short in Mungu, had little time for him. But that spurred the cook to further effort.

Ali stood outside the kitchen. The reading meant less than nothing

to him. He was a Moslem and he was not a native and generally speaking he despised the natives whether they read the Bible or not. It had not all been jam in his master's absence. In the beginning he had enjoyed himself. He went to stay with a fellow countryman who was chief personal boy to a settler at Molo. He spent three weeks there but as his friend was very busy entertaining him, and taking the time of entertaining off his official hours, the settler was compelled to ask Ali to move on. He moved to Nairobi where there were many compatriots. His money gave out and there was nothing else to do but to return to the farm. The Kikuyu squatters and the Lumbwa herds were not nice to him. McKenna was away, so they tried to repay him for his erstwhile haughtiness and rudeness. Since he had the normal sort of memory he was deeply hurt by their behaviour. Now it was a great relief for him that his master had come back.

Masai, with a couple of wives behind him, came across the compound. He had no complaints against Masai who had never liked him and therefore had, simply enough, given him a wide berth whether or not McKenna was in residence. He walked past with the women sweating on account of the hard work they had put in on the maize shamba. For a moment or so he envied Masai for being such an independent person and taking no part in the real business of life: intriguing. But as that was less than a thought he had no desire to become conscious of it. Masai and the women disappeared on the other side of the posho store, and Ali continued to watch the office where McKenna was closeted with Eric. It was getting on to lunch-time.

The cook had finished reading and the water-cart oxen boy smiled because he disliked the cook and had understood nothing of what the cook was reading. Two excellent reasons for a merry smile. Then McKenna and Eric came out of the office.

"Pity," McKenna said, "that I can't ask you to stay on but if you stayed here, Eric, then there would be really nothing left for me to do."

"It was great fun," Eric said.

They went towards the house and Ali decided that he must wait with his complaints till after luncheon.

"Did anything exciting happen in the district during my absence?" McKenna asked at luncheon.

"Nothing much happened," Eric said. "Adams's farm is in quarantine. Considering that he has hardly any cattle left it's rather funny. Reggie Newton said the other day at the club that probably Adams himself got East Coast Fever."

Eric could not help laughing and McKenna thought that was precisely the type of joke Reggie would make.

"When was his farm put into quarantine?" he asked.

"Six weeks ago."

"How is he? Have you seen him lately?"

"I haven't but there was a to-do about him. Some chappies driving in a car had a breakdown on his farm. I think they came from Nairobi. They left the car and went to the house and knocked on his door. It was after sundown. There was no answer, so they knocked again and the window opened and he fired at them."

"Good God," McKenna said and put down his knife and fork.

"Don't worry," Eric said, "he missed them."

"He must have been drunk."

"Major Laborde told me that he's given up drinking. You wouldn't believe it, would you?"

"I can't believe it. What did the men do?"

"They went into Kampi ya Marwa and kicked up a hell of a fuss with the D.C. Adams said he thought they were elephants or buffaloes, so the laugh was on them but the D.C. now hates him like poison."

"I wish he wouldn't do things like that."

Ali came in with the cheese and McKenna asked Eric if he had any other news for him.

"I know," said Eric in the voice of one who doesn't know. "that Mrs. Wace is a great friend of yours. Now I was her neighbour for five months and so I couldn't help seeing that her farm is just falling to pieces."

"What do you mean by that?"

"The cattle are dying, they're not dipped and the boys pinch the milk and there is no supervision, and she has about seventy old bullocks and they just eat the grass and are no damned good at all. There was an outbreak of paratyphoid and she lost about twenty calves."

"What about that man Monkhouse?"

"He's a bastard. I don't like him. I honestly don't know what's going to become of that farm. I hope she has some money of her own. The farm is simply falling to pieces."

Ali, praying fervently that Eric should go soon, appeared with the coffee.

"I'll have a long talk with her," McKenna said.

"Please talk to her," Eric said with a blush. "She's such a wonderful person and it's a shame how badly life is treating her."

"Have you seen anything of the baby?"

"No, not much."

Ali waited patiently while Eric's boy loaded Eric's car with Eric's luggage. Eric said good-bye to McKenna and the dogs chased the car till it got to the bridge. The basset hound was not among them:

not because it was hot but because he could not risk by a short absence to lose the cherished one again. "If only the short rains come early we won't have a drought," said Eric before he drove off.

"Sir, please very good luck you back," Ali said. "I ask you to my talk."

"What is it?"

A torrent of curious sentences followed. Kagwa the gardener had been his undoing. Kagwa was a fiend, an intriguer and a ruffian. He gave example after example of Kagwa's premeditated wickedness.

"Send in Kagwa," McKenna said.

He was listening to Ali without looking at him and when he said, send in Kagwa, it was almost like telling the sergeant major to send in the second witness.

Kagwa was about fifty and looked as if he were eighty. Once he had asked him how old he was. "Twenty," answered Kagwa. Age expressed in years and years expressed in numbers meant little to the Kikuyu. He came in wearing an old brown trilby he had bought second-hand at the Indian duca in Kampi ya Marwa. The crown of the trilby was missing but there was a vulturine guinea fowl feather stuck into the hat-band.

"Kagwa," said McKenna in his slow hesitant Swahili, "Ali says your soul is bad."

"No, Bwana," said Kagwa and he was not looking at Ali and Ali's eyes were averted too.

"Ali," McKenna said, "you repeat in front of Kagwa what you told me."

"Yes, sir," Ali said promptly. He was only too glad to repeat it since Kagwa spoke no English. The torrent burst forth.

"No, in Swahili."

That was disconcerting. It is so much easier to accuse someone, so to speak, behind his back. But Ali was of an optimistic temperament and thought he would be the exception to that sad rule. He was not and his accusations fell flat in front of Kagwa who with eyes like a Newfoundland dog was watching him in utter innocence.

"Sir," said Ali in final desperation, "he bad man, he won't speak me, he no friend."

"I can't help that," said McKenna and he dismissed them both, and he saw there were tears in Ali's eyes.

Shortly after he came out of the house followed by the dogs. He walked fast towards the ridge that was the boundary of the farm. He hurried as if he had an appointment. The grass was still green near the three umbrella thorns. He felt slightly bashful as he approached them but then the bashfulness went. He should not have mentioned

that tree in the middle to his brother Alastair. But as his brother was no longer of the loudly living, telling him was almost like not telling at all. Anyway it hardly mattered.

He sat down and lit a cigarette and for some time he was busy smoking. He should have written to Muriel Marsh, though she had asked him not to write to her. Still, a few lines would have been like waving a handkerchief after the train had left the station, even though the person who saw you off could see you no more. He must write. That was a decision and because he was honest with himself he knew he would not write. And that did not matter either. His hand smoothed the grass and soon the grass would be yellow and then there would not be any grass left. They were in for a drought provided the short rains did not come early that year. The sky was now completely blue and he could not imagine rain clouds ever disturbing that serene yet murderous blue, and the thought came to him that if the short rains came early his brother Alastair would recover. The sky, however, was not on Alastair's side.

The terrier jumped up and began to bark. He barked and wagged his stumpy tail and the retriever bitch stopped de-ticking the basset hound and joined in the barking. McKenna stood up and there was Gloria on her way to his house. She was pushing the pram.

He hurried down the slope and as they met, Gloria smiled a friendly, obedient smile. "I hope," she said, "I'm not disturbing you."

"Good gracious, no," he said.

"It's a bit early," she said. "Most people usually take their siesta around this time."

"I never sleep in the afternoon."

Gloria sighed, for Miles inevitably rested in the afternoon.

"Come in and have tea," he said.

"Say hullo to your godson," she said and her smile was even brighter.

"Hullo," McKenna said.

The baby was awake. The eyes moved right and left but the face was motionless. Perhaps some day the eyes would begin to move the face. The toy motor-car lay in the pram.

"That was a very nice present to give him," Gloria said. "It was very sweet of you. Did you buy it in Nairobi?"

"No, I bought it in London. Just accidentally, you know."

He wanted to drop the subject. "Has he many other toys?" he asked.

"No, he's too young." And she wished he would stop talking about the child. She would have preferred him to have made a pass

at her. More human and she could say no and would be far less frightened of him. The baby looked spruce and unbelievably clean.

She left the pram on the verandah and went into the sitting-room and sat down. She was awed and did not know what to say. She crossed her slim legs and clasped her hands on her knee. "You must tell me about London," she said. "And everything," she added and settled down to listen.

He talked mostly of matters that had importance for neither of them; but the impersonal conversation helped Gloria to lose her fear. When he stopped she asked earnestly how far Alastair lived from Stevenage station. He said six miles and Ali appeared with the tea tray.

"Do you take sugar?" she asked brightly.

"No, thank you," he said.

She poured out the tea and though she remembered all Betty's instructions she did not refer to the vital matters that were throughout the afternoon uppermost in her mind. Not to talk of them gave her a perverse sense of peace and security. The baby had fallen asleep but the time of its next feed was approaching. So it woke up and started to howl.

"I must go back to feed him," Gloria said.

"Next time you come bring the bottle with you."

"I don't want to be a nuisance to you."

"You couldn't be a nuisance," he said. They were in the doorway and the light was on her and he could not help saying, "Nobody could call you a nuisance." She went over to the pram and he said, in a matter-of-fact voice, "We must have a long talk about your farm affairs."

"Come round to-morrow and have a drink. Thank you for my tea."

"How much money have you left?"

"I still have plenty," she said quickly and pushed the pram on to the red dusty track. "I'm not a spendthrift."

"We'll go into all that to-morrow. Do you mind if I look into your farm books? Are Miles's creditors very nasty?"

"Some are. Bye-bye David," she called and he watched her pushing the pram. The baby seemed to smile again but he was not certain of that. He went to the garage.

The sun was setting when he arrived at Kampi ya Marwa. He drove to the stores and Bignell was standing behind the counter, heavy and dressed in white, and McKenna thought that he must have stood there like that during his entire absence.

"Nice to see you," Bignell said. "Come behind and have a peg."

"I don't mind if I do," McKenna said.

Behind the stores was Bignell's house. He had two rooms. One he slept in and the other served all other purposes. The walls were profusely covered with coloured posters of whisky, gin and cigarette advertisements. There hung the Gold Flake young lady in red beside the two terriers of Black and White. The fat huntsman of Sportsman cigarettes was the neighbour of the White Horse. The monkish person of Plymouth Gin was side by side with an advertisement of Eley & Kynoch cartridges.

"Sitty down," Bignell said. He poured out two drinks and took a cheroot and lit it. "I know you don't like them. Well, tell me all about it. Not bad stuff this. Do you know which was the most awful moment of my life?"

"When you ate of human flesh?"

"No." He laughed complacently. "When a Zulu boy broke my last bottle of whisky down in Bechuanaland and that meant going without a drink for a week."

"It must have been awful."

"But if I come to think of it that wasn't the most awful moment of my life. I went home. I hadn't been home for fifteen years. I arrived at Plymouth and hadn't a cent on me. A couple of sharks had won all my money at poker. The usual trick. The man in the stateroom without a bean."

"What did you do?"

"Bignell shrugged his shoulders. "That didn't worry me," he said and poured out drinks, "but I'll tell you what got my goat. One of those bastards told me that he had taken part in the Jameson Raid. I have always been a great admirer of Doctor Jameson. So naturally I thought he was a pukka gent. But when I stood there in Plymouth without a cent in the world, it suddenly came to me that he was too young to have been in the Jameson Raid. I was just an ignorant sap."

His cheroot went out and he did not bother to relight it. "Had a good time?" he asked.

"I had a very pleasant time."

"Glad to hear that." He scratched his head. "I say, what is going to become of Gloria Wace?"

"Why?"

"My dearman, why do you say, 'Why?' She still owes me two hundred quid. Miles owed me three hundred. She paid off a hundred but that doesn't clear the account, does it? Now I only let her buy for cash. But she was here to-day and said that she'd have to start running up a bill again. I said that was one of the few things I wouldn't

let her do." He laughed because he thought he was being funny. "Well, she just stood there, so I said all right run up a fiver, I don't mind losing a fiver. She looked very sad, the poor girl. But what's going to be the end of it?"

"I saw her half an hour ago," McKenna said, "and she said that everything was all right and she was getting on well."

"You've given her a thousand pounds." Bignell had a large belly and he had to sit at a distance from the table on account of it. He spilled a lot of drink on his white ducks. His hand trembled too.

"How the hell do you know that?" McKenna asked.

"Now come on, McKenna. You know as well as I that if you do something in Cairo people will know about it next day in Jo'burg. Now you listen to me. I could be your father." He laughed again. "What are you going to do about her? Give her another thousand? It's like patching up the roof of a house that has no walls. Miles owed money to everybody. She will never be able to pay off the debts. Besides, her farm is in such a bad way that one just couldn't get it going again. Miles was, I'm told, a damned good husband but I can tell you that he was a bloody bad farmer. Now you take my advice. Go to Gloria and say this to her: Look here Gloria, old girl, here is a first-class ticket to London, off you go, my beautiful one, laugh there in London while your creditors blow your farm skyhigh. That's the only thing to do."

"She won't go."

"Well, you ought to know. Have another tot. You know you're my best customer. Here's how. There is, of course, another way out." His furtive pig's eyes were narrowing.

"Let's hear it."

"Marry her."

"Don't talk nonsense."

"You needn't blush." He laughed contentedly. "Now listen to me, fellow me lad. I had once a bibi and she was the finest Nandi woman I've ever seen. All I paid for her was forty sheep and thirty goats and a ten shilling note. . . . I say, what's the matter with you?"

McKenna had stood up. "You'd better be careful," he said.

Bignell was a shrewd judge of other people's anger, so he said quickly, "No harm meant. Sit down. All I wanted to point out was that I had a damned good time with that bibi and she didn't cost me a thousand quid, . . . Now then, don't start getting up again. Have a drink. If I spent a thousand quid on a woman, . . . All right, McKenna my boy, I was only joking. Sit down. Joking; that's all. I want to help that poor girl as much as you. I wish I

could find a man to look after her." He beamed, for he had found a safe wicket.

"You have a very delicate way of expressing yourself," McKenna said and did not feel angry any more.

"That's the best one I've heard for a long time," Bignell said and laughed loudly. He slapped McKenna's shoulder. "I'm a cad, sir. Never been a gentleman in me life. What are you going to do about her?"

"I wish I knew."

"You're a rich man," Bignell said. "Let's imagine you give her five thousand pounds. That's a lot of money. It's all the money in the world. Nevertheless in two years' time she would be in the same boat again. Mind you, I've known women who make better farmers than men. I've known a woman, she was a Mrs. Martin up at Kitale, I wonder if you knew her, well, she paid off her husband's debts in three years and then made a lot of money out of farming and eventually she sold out and went home and I bet she lives on the fat of the land. But she was an ugly, dour woman, you know the sort of woman who tells you not to smoke before breakfast. Our Gloria is a different type. If I wasn't an old man I'd just take her and put her on my lap and say: give us a kiss and I'll look after you. So you take my advice and either send her home or marry her. She's a good looker if there ever was one."

"I know she's very good looking but one doesn't go and marry a woman because she's good looking."

"Why not?"

"Bignell, you're an old fool."

"I'm not. And what about that child?"

"What about it?"

"Somebody must look after it. She's a widow and he's an orphan. Be chivalrous, McKenna, and marry her."

He patted his belly. Nobody could ever quarrel with him. He was far too crafty; and he knew that.

"You're an old fool," said McKenna, and that was all he could say.

Bignell walked with him to his car. The sun was going fast. An askari came riding on a mule and a native child was running towards the Indian duka. The Union Jack had already been hauled down and the flagstaff was like an immense toothpick.

"Anyway, I must get her out of this mess," McKenna said as he got into the car.

"I've told you how," said Bignell and slowly trundled back to the stores.

McKenna looked at his watch. It was ten past six. Yes, he had

time. Adams and Laborde could wait. They would not vanish in the meantime. Not they. He drove fast and night was down on earth when he reached Gloria's house. It was cool and the chill of the night was on its way. The pram was on the verandah. That child should be indoors. "Gloria," he called and there was no answer. "Gloria," he called again and he opened the door and the sitting-room was empty. He heard footsteps, and it was Monkhouse who came in through the other door.

"Oh, it's you," he said. "Blast those niggers, they forgot to make the fire." He began to shout: "boy, boy."

"Where's Mrs. Wace?" McKenna asked.

"Gone to the Newtons to have a sundowner."

"When will she be back?"

"I'm not her keeper."

"Quite; but why do you let that child stay out there in the cold? It should be indoors."

"Look here," said Monkhouse, "I'm not the wet nurse. I'm a p.g. and I pay ten quid a month and it isn't my job to look after the kid." He was very much on his dignity.

McKenna turned away from him and went out on to the verandah and pushed the pram into the sitting-room. The baby did not wake up. A boy appeared and McKenna told him to take the pram into the nursery. Monkhouse had sat down and he tried to give the impression that he was unaware of McKenna's presence. When McKenna and the boy reached the nursery the boy asked, "Should I put it there?" He pointed at the cot. He had dirty hands.

"Leave it to me," McKenna said and he picked up the baby. It was a curious feeling to hold it in his arms. Much heavier than he had thought. The baby was still sleeping and because he did not want to wake it he held it gently and then very slowly carried it to the cot. The baby did not wake up and that pleased him. "Tell the memsahib I was here," he said. He went back to the sitting room. Another boy was lighting the fire and Monkhouse was standing in front of it with his back to McKenna.

"There is one piece of advice I should like to give you," McKenna said. "You won't go very far in this country if you continue to be so egoistic."

Monkhouse did not move and needless to add he did not answer. McKenna got into the car and drove away.

Well, he said half aloud to himself, he was not letting down Miles. And because Bignell had suggested that he should marry Gloria he wanted to conjure up Miles's friendly face, but he failed in it miserably, for instead of Miles it was the sleeping baby that put in

an appearance; and a little later for no reason whatever McKenna thought that no man would dislike to wake up beside Gloria in the morning.

(III)

The night accentuated the dilapidated condition of the house in which Adams lived. But the night has a way of accentuating most things. On the top of the step stood a smoking hurricane lamp and as McKenna mounted the step he could not resist turning the wick lower. Adams was sitting beside the fire and Laborde was lying back on the settee. It was Laborde who saw McKenna first.

"My dear fellow," he said rising. "My dear fellow." He seemed fatter and his clean shaven countenance radiated ecclesiastical good will. "It's very nice to see you, very nice indeed."

Adams had also stood up. His thin, gaunt figure, though he was standing straight in front of the fire, gave the impression that he must be somewhere out in the cold. He was wearing a khaki shirt, probably the same one he wore five months ago.

"I must thank you for the books," he said after they shook hands. "How much do I owe you?"

"Forget it."

"That's very good of you but you must let me pay for them." He said that very seriously.

"What was it like in London?" Laborde asked and wished he could be alone with his friend. Now that McKenna was back, he felt that Adams was a completely unnecessary creature.

"Why go to a town you know?" Adams asked. "Why should one take the trouble to visit a town one knows well? Now, if you had travelled to some unknown part of the world then I could understand you. But there is no pioneer spirit left in this world. You all go away, but you're tied to a string and that string pulls you back every so often. As a matter of fact that string is usually tied to your mother's petticoat. If I had my way I'd only permit people to leave England if they promised never to come back." Oh, it was good to be able to talk to McKenna again; and his eyes shone and let the argument start.

"That's a lot of nonsense," Laborde said. "Look at you. You never move from your chair and yet you want people to go adventuring without the hope of being able to return."

While Adams answered him McKenna sat down and he looked at them with a lot of affection. It was good to be back with them. "Is it true," he asked, "that you have given up drink?"

"I have," Adams said. "Drink interferes with thought. Drink exhilarates you and exhilaration is the mortal enemy of clear thought."

"He's talking a lot of drivel," Laborde said. "Anyway, you might offer your friends a drink."

"It's over there but if you want to get drunk don't do it here."

"Afraid of temptation?" Laborde asked.

"No, but drunken talk would tire me."

Laborde laughed out loud. "The best joke of the year," he said.

McKenna looked at Adams. He was dead serious and for the first time he realized that the man had no sense of humour. It gave him a queer sensation to realize that. Here was the friend who had amused him for years, and that friend had never understood a joke and could not see the funny side of himself and of the people around him. He looked again at Adams and then he said, "I wish you hadn't given up the bottle." For the bottle is the next best thing to having a sense of humour. But friendship stood above bottle and a sense of humour, and thus his discovery would cause regret but would effect no change.

"Sorry," Adams said, "but I've made up my mind."

"I hear your farm is in quarantine," McKenna said.

"I don't mind. I've cut down my expenses by more than half. I live on practically nothing. I've a good mind to sell my cattle altogether. There was a time when I thought that cattle-breeding was a fine job. Watching them grow and all that. But it is overrated. You watch them grow in order to kill them and make money out of them. What you should do is to watch them grow and know they don't belong to you and provided they behave themselves they have as much right to die of old age as you."

"Next thing he'll become a vegetarian," Laborde said.

"I'm not a hypocrite," Adams said.

"I know you're not a hypocrite," Laborde said. "But all you do is to wait day and night for a great opportunity to show all of us that you're as great as Plutarch's heroes."

Adams shook his head, but he blushed and gave McKenna a quick, pleading glance.

"You always exaggerate," McKenna said to Laborde.

Adams lit his pipe. "I had an annoying letter," he said.

"Who writes you annoying letters?" Laborde asked.

"My bloody nephew."

"I didn't know you had a nephew," McKenna said.

"I wish I hadn't. He wrote me a letter and he says he's seriously thinking of coming out to Kenya for a few months. He has the cheek to ask me to put him up. He's an interior decorator or something." He rose and went to the table and found the letter. "You listen to

this. 'For eight years I've been trudging round London trying to make a living out of trying to persuade people that they should have a different wallpaper. It sounds simple but it's more complicated than words can tell. The amount of lunches and dinners one must eat and the dull people one has to gather round one's table! And then I have to persuade them to buy Louis XV furniture made in Victorian days and I hate Louis XV. Even the genuine Louis XV. What I love is Empire but there isn't much of it about and anyway my clients have far too bad taste for that.' He goes on like that for two pages. Who cares about furniture?"

"Some people do," Laborde said.

"The bigger fools they. Listen. 'I must have a break even if only for a few months. I want to go to a virgin country and forget wallpaper and imitation Chinese Chippendale!' Well," said Adams throwing the letter into the fireplace, "I don't want him to come here."

"What is he like?" McKenna asked.

"I don't know. Never saw him in my life. I'll just ignore his letter."

The letter was completely charred and in a little while the charred remains shot up the chimney.

"It'll interest you to know," Adams said, "that I have re-read *Crime and Punishment*. One should re-read a book every ten years, then compare the thoughts of ten years ago with the thoughts of to-day. Then one will know whether one has developed or not."

"You're perfectly right," McKenna said. "The trouble with you is that you're always right. To be always right is to be fundamentally in the wrong. Life is seldom right and to be incessantly in the right means that you are out of touch with life."

"Your own epitaph," said Adams, and McKenna said nothing. Laborde had surreptitiously filled their glasses.

"Nietzsche," said Adams, "says somewhere that one must get above life. I don't remember where he says that, nor do I remember the exact words, but that's the gist of it. Help yourselves to a drink."

He stood up and went to the table and Laborde, pulling himself well back into the shadow, emptied the clandestine contents of his glass. McKenna pulled himself back too. But in his case it was on account of Adam's smell of unwashed humanity.

"Don't bother," McKenna said. "I must be getting along. You're dining with me, Michael, and I hope you'll stay the night."

Laborde thanked him gratefully. Adams did not see them off. Before they left he said thoughtfully, "I think I'm going to re-read *Plutarch*."

"Wait ten years," sniggered Laborde.

One of the boys stood in the doorway with a hurricane lamp.

"That lamp's smoking again," Laborde said.

"Apparently his lamps always smoke," McKenna said.

Laborde settled down with a sigh in the car. It was a contented sigh. "He's going potty," he said.

"He was quite clever about my epitaph."

"Don't be ridiculous. That wasn't your epitaph. You're far too honest to be always in the right," He laughed. "During your absence I was charged by an elephant and so I had to shoot it. You ought to have seen the fuss the D.C. made. He wanted me to take out a licence. I'm not the man to pay sixty guineas for shooting an elephant that charged me. You can have the trophy, I said. It wasn't much of a trophy. Then the D.C. made me promise never to be charged by an elephant again. But you know how it is. I saw the brute and suddenly I wanted to shoot it very badly. I got it with one shot. Talking of the D.C., his wife had a son and she'll be back next month."

Laborde was full of local news; and considering that he was on bad terms with most of his near and distant neighbours it was surprising how well informed he was, "I'll have a lot more to tell you," he said as they got out of the car and Ali with an electric torch was guiding them to the front door. McKenna stayed behind to talk to Masai. It was pitch dark. The moon would not be up before ten. "Memsahib Wace is here," Ali whispered to Laborde.

"Hullo, Gloria," Laborde said as he entered the sitting room. Gloria was standing near the window. She was pale and there was something about her that reminded Laborde of a small girl whose toy had been taken away by an unjust nanny. In his army days he had been a popular fellow and because he played a good hand at bridge, he was much liked by the more social wives of his fellow officers. Hence he had seen a lot of other people's family lives and since he was aloof and was never involved, he had often noticed the lack of patience of mothers and governesses. The nanny who had taken that toy away from Gloria deserved a proper ticking off.

"Where's David?" Gloria asked.

"He'll be in in a moment. What's the matter?" He nearly added "my little girl" but thought better of it. But which of her toys had she lost? McKenna came in.

"How nice . . ." he began. But Gloria interrupted him.

"David, please come to the farm at once."

"Anything happened to the baby?"

"It's not the baby," she said impatiently. "Please come. You

must help me. I know you won't let me down. I'll tell you on the way."

"May I come too?" Laborde asked.

Gloria was already out of the room and so she did not hear him. That did not discourage Laborde. He followed them quietly, and half-way to the farm he caught up with them and walked on McKenna's side.

Gloria, though she refrained from giving all the details, related the happenings of the afternoon. To begin with she had ridden over to Betty to have a drink with her. Betty's first question had been, "What about the nurse?" (Naturally she did not repeat their conversation to McKenna.) Gloria had to confess that she had not the courage to broach the subject.

"You're a fool," Betty said. "It's no good my trying to help you if you do nothing about it."

"But I couldn't do it, darling. I get so tongue-tied in his presence."

"With your looks you shouldn't be tongue-tied in any man's presence."

"But he isn't any man. He's a hard martinet."

"The hard martinet gave you a thousand pounds."

"Darling, I wish he hadn't, I honestly wish he hadn't."

She cried a little and Betty comforted her and eventually she promised to co-operate. "It's seven," said Betty looking at the clock. "You haven't a nurse yet, so you'd better mount that horse of yours and go back to the baby. And for God's sake don't go about riding after sunset. You'll get killed one of these days."

She kissed Betty good night and said that if she were killed she would be near Miles. But she did not say that aloud.

In a way she was afraid of Betty. She mounted her surefooted mean Somali pony and jog-trotted along the dark track. It gave her a sense of exaltation to ride in the night. Over there in that bush a leopard might be lurking; yonder behind that clump of trees a lion may sit. One night, about three months ago, a pack of wild dogs had followed her. The pony was nervous; on the other hand she was a good horsewoman. The wild dogs began to close in. The pony nearly threw her, then broke into a wild gallop and she loved the speed and the feeling of danger. They outdistanced the wild dogs. During their mad career she thought that there might be a pig hole and that it would trip the pony over. That added to her sense of jubilation. That night as she lay alone in bed she felt less miserable than she had done for a long time. But to-night the night was silent. The hyænas were, of course, abroad but that did not matter. She reached the farm and

she was not exactly happy when the nursery boy told her that McKenna had been there and had pushed the pram into the nursery.

"Chakula," she said to Kichuki and went to the sitting-room. Monkhouse was reading. "Late as usual," he said.

"I'm sorry," she said because she did not wish to lose her ten pounds a month.

"At home," he said, "you couldn't go on saying you're sorry and then do the same thing all over again. You people out here, you imagine that the world belongs to you. It doesn't. When I came here I asked you what time you eat. You said seven-thirty. I haven't yet had a meal at seven-thirty in this house."

"I said I'm sorry."

Monkhouse laughed. He was not a prepossessing person and laughter did not add to his charms. Dinner was served and he sat silent and grim but now and then he guffawed, still enjoying his little joke. That made Gloria nervous. The lugubrious meal reached its end and as they came out of the dining-room Monkhouse said, "The man with the ginger moustache was here."

"You mean McKenna?"

"That's right. He has no manners."

"Really?" She did not want to sound sarcastic but notwithstanding her self-control her voice, for once, acted independently.

"I had a good mind to knock his block off," he said.

She said nothing. She thought that was the simplest way of ending the conversation.

"I don't know what's the matter with you people," Monkhouse said. Her silence infuriated him. "You all think you're so superior, but I can assure you that my dad could buy out the whole lot of you without having to take out his wallet."

"Including McKenna?"

"Including him and the whole lot of you thrown in."

"You silly ass," said Gloria. She could not help it and she started to laugh.

"Say that again," Monkhouse said. He came over to her and she ceased laughing and for a moment she thought that he would strike her. "Say that again."

She hid once more behind the screen of silence. That made Monkhouse completely wild.

"Of course you won't say it again," he shouted. "You know that if you dared to say that again I'd walk out of this house and then all there would be left for you to do would be to go to the nearest doss-house. You think you're a lady. I know your type. You don't know even how to boil an egg but you think you're better than me. You never

did a stroke of work in your life. All you know is how to wriggle that behind of yours and to sit down in such a way that anybody who feels like it can see up to your navel."

His words surprised him. It was not Gloria's habit to wriggle her posterior and as far as her navel was concerned not even a bishop could have objected to the decorum she displayed whenever she sat down. But now he had said it. With his scanty experience of women he expected her to burst into tears and then remembering the ten quid a month she would forget his offensive remarks. Gloria did not burst into tears. She went out of the room and he said to himself: let her sulk. He took his book and sat down beside the fire. The dachshund was snoring in an armchair and on second thoughts he picked the dog up and put him on the floor. "That's the place for a dog," he said with a stern sense of justice. After a while he looked up and on the mantelpiece Gloria's travelling clock (Miles had bought it for her at Finnigan's) told him that she had left the room half an hour ago. Then it was an hour. She was overdoing it but let her stew in her own juice. When she returned he might find an opportunity to broach the subject of buying the farm. After such an emotional crisis and afraid to lose the monthly ten quid, she might be in the right mood for it. He had planned the whole thing.

His plan was to let her have three hundred pounds cash and he would take over the mortgage, though not the personal debts. Three hundred pounds cash would make her open her eyes with greed and contentment. Probably she had never seen three hundred smackers in her life. He filled his pipe and heard the child crying. He was twenty-five years old and had no time for kids. He tapped his foot impatiently but after a little while the wailing became a sort of background to his thoughts. Gloria had deserved his insults. She was a stupid vain creature and he disapproved of her accent. It was very different from his and therefore he was convinced that it was put on in order to annoy him. Generally speaking people were either below him or his equals. If they considered themselves his betters they were just cheats. He puffed away and he heard footsteps on the verandah. She was coming back. He smiled; for he was willing to be gracious. Moreover, the farm was well-nigh in his pocket.

Laborde was the first to come into the room. Monkhouse had not seen him before. As Laborde had his moustache no more, there was nothing in his appearance to put Monkhouse's back up. A pasty-faced benign old duffer who looked a bit like the auctioneer at Beverley. But when he saw McKenna coming into the room he felt that he did not like the situation.

"Mr. Monkhouse," said McKenna politely, "we must ask you

to go to your room and to pack your things and to leave this place as soon as you can."

Monkhouse rose. "Who the hell . . ." he began and it was Laborde who stopped him.

"We don't want trouble," he said. "Don't forget we're white people in a black country and we don't want to behave badly in front of the natives. You've insulted Mrs. Wace and so you must go."

"She started to. . . ."

"Mr. Monkhouse," said McKenna a little louder, "I'm sure you will go and pack your things and take your car and leave the farm."

Monkhouse scowled. With a low forehead and fat lips it is easy to scowl. So he scowled hard and then he went out of the room.

"Well," Laborde said but Monkhouse had returned.

"Mrs. Wace," he said, "owes me about four pounds for the rent. I paid in advance."

"I'll give you a cheque for four pounds," McKenna said.

"I don't take cheques from strangers," Monkhouse said but he said it in too low a voice for McKenna to hear. Trying to keep back a smile, Laborde was watching McKenna write out the cheque. "Here you are," McKenna said and gave it to Monkhouse. Monkhouse took it, read it carefully and went out and Laborde looked at his retreating figure and there was that quizzical expression in his eyes which is reserved for people one is never going to see again. McKenna became aware of the fact that the baby had been crying throughout the proceedings.

Gloria had been listening in the dining-room, the door of which was fortunately ajar. She came in beaming and she thought that she had misjudged McKenna. "David," she said, "you handled the situation wonderfully."

"There wasn't any situation," he said. "Your baby is crying."

"I'm sorry," she said and rushed from the room.

"Now let's go back to your far more comfortable homestead," said Laborde, "and have a drink on this." He walked slowly round the room. "Funny room this," he said.

With much concentration he gazed at the Japanese prints, then went over to the whips and crops, took down one, examined it and then hung it on its peg. "A dashed funny room this."

Gloria came back carrying the baby in her arms. She was a pretty sight and as she stroked the small head the baby stopped whimpering.

"You must have a drink before you go," she said. She got out a bottle of whisky and she poured out three large whiskies. She swigged hers down quickly and sighed a contented sigh. "Thank God that blighter has gone."

In fact the blighter was going exactly at that moment. They heard him starting off his car and they listened till the sound of the car got itself mixed up with those of the night.

"He'll be in Nairobi early in the morning," said McKenna. He said that because he felt a little sorry for Monkhouse.

"I don't care," Laborde laughed.

But suddenly Gloria began to care. She had had her victory but at the same time she had lost a badly needed sum of money.

"I came over around six o'clock," McKenna said, "I wanted to have a talk with you. May I come over some time to-morrow morning?" She nodded absent-mindedly. "Around ten, if I may."

They were ready to leave her and Laborde decided to put in a word: he had taken a strong dislike to the Japanese prints.

"If that bouncer," he said sweetly, "asks you to let him have back the rent, then just remind him that David has paid him a few minutes ago."

"Paid him?" Gloria asked.

"Paid him. He said that four pounds were due back to him, so David gave him a cheque."

"That's quite unimportant," McKenna said and wished her a hasty good night and Laborde had to trot to catch up with him.

"You shouldn't have told her about that cheque," McKenna said. "She has enough worries without thinking that now she owes me another four pounds."

"I don't want her to take your help for granted."

"That I'm afraid isn't your business."

"Trying to be rude?"

"I'm not trying to be rude but really Michael you shouldn't have repeated that."

"I apologise," Laborde said and grinned at the night and then for no reason whatever he remembered that it had taken him years to stop McKenna calling him sir as there was about twenty years between them. The moon came up before they reached the house. It came up red and huge behind the swamp. "I never liked the moon out East," Laborde said. "It frightens me."

They were not talkative during dinner but afterwards Laborde said, "You remember what I've said about the moon." He stared hard at his cigar. "It comes over me like that. Not often but when it does it makes me feel miserable. What right have we Europeans to come out here?" That being a rhetorical question he went on without stopping. "That moon out there isn't our moon. We haven't got such a moon in England. It's a dangerous moon. Strangers are always dangerous. But why are we here? Why are

you here? Why am I here? To-night I feel like packing up and going home and retiring to a Bournemouth boardinghouse and spending my time congratulating myself on having left this alien moon. To-morrow though, I'll forget it again." He smiled. "Now David, do you mind if I ask you a question?"

"About the moon?"

"No, about Gloria Wace."

"It will be more difficult to answer."

They laughed a little and McKenna refilled their glasses and Laborde asked, "What are you going to do about Gloria?"

"I must help her to get out of the awful pit into which Miles's death has flung her. I see no other way out. You may say that I'm trying to bite off more than I can chew and probably you're right, but I must go on helping her."

"That's a very explicit answer but I only see one way of helping her. You'll have to marry her, old boy."

"You know I'm not going to marry her. Bignell, the old fool, said the same. But it's out of the question."

"Good for Bignell. If you go on throwing good money after bad, that's your business and you're a rich man, and so I suppose you can afford it. It might become a hobby with you and a rich man is entitled to his hobbies. But if you do want to help her then I can assure you it'll misfire. You're not going to help her by giving her money. You remember I told you before you went home to buy her a passage to England. But she doesn't want to go to England. My dear man if you want to help her you must marry her."

"I'm not the marrying type; besides, it wouldn't help her."

Laborde felt relieved. He had expected McKenna to tell him to shut up. He drank some whisky and went on. "Gloria knows nothing about farming. She's much too handicapped with debts and what not to be able to make a success of it even if she knew how to farm. She'll go from bad to worse in the financial sense of course, and the day will come when you'll see that never before has financial help produced such misery and unhappiness."

"I see your point," said McKenna, "but really you can't expect me to marry her just because of that. You know my habits and my way of life and you know too that I rather cling to them."

"It's too late," Laborde said comfortably. "It's no good kicking against it. You'll see yourself. In my regiment there used to be a subaltern who one night slept in a hotel in Bombay. It was a small room and he was terribly hot and so he decided to take a stroll in the garden. There somebody fired at him from behind and the bullet went into his left lung." Laborde gave his chest a bang to indicate

the spot. "He survived, but only just, and had to retire into civilian life and he died about three years later. Incidentally the man who shot him was caught and it turned out that he wanted to shoot another man whom he was to meet in the grounds. The other man was a sort of professional blackmailer and he gave him a date with the intention to shoot him. My poor friend, because the room was so small and so hot, turned up in the grounds at the appointed time. So there you are."

"I don't see what that has to do with my marrying Gloria, or rather not marrying her."

"A lot. If you hadn't been Miles's friend, if you hadn't been with him when he died, if he hadn't left his affairs in such a mess and if Gloria hadn't refused to return to England. . . . You see what I mean?"

"I do. But even that isn't a reason for me to marry her. She's far younger than I. I don't think I've the slightest attraction for her and it's just out of the question. In fact, it's just too silly for words."

"Of course it is but it's the only way out."

"I'll try to find another way out."

"Good luck to you. But let me say this. I was married for ten years. My poor wife died and she was a dear creature and God bless her soul. I was never in love with her. I married her because there are moments when one feels so lonely that marriage seems the only way out. Probably it is the only way out. Anyway, I married her and I wasn't in love with her and I don't think she was in love with me either. Yet we were happy and ours was a successful marriage as marriages go. I only say that because I should like to impress upon you that to get married is not such an important thing after all. I'm convinced that once you are married to a woman you're bound to get on with her. Gloria is a good girl. She isn't a gold-digger and she is pretty and so I honestly don't see why you shouldn't be comparatively happy with her. And I can tell you that if I had a son and he came to me and asked me whether he should be a sailor or a soldier, I'd give it much more thought than if he asked me whether he should marry Miss Brown or Miss Smith."

"You can put your case very convincingly," said McKenna.

"You bet I can."

"Then I think it's time for bed."

He saw Laborde to the guest house, then he walked slowly back. The moon had lighted up the compound, and the kitchen and the cart near the water tank and the water tank itself seemed ready to go off to dance a weird dance. It was like the light of a day that only existed in a nightmare. The shape of the swamp and of the pointing dead

trees of the island were clear and strong. Yet it was all without reality. But McKenna hardly noticed the moonlight. So, according to Laborde, all you had to do was to get married. Marriage because it was marriage worked out well in the end. The retrievers came dashing in through the gate and sat down beside him listening to the night. But supposing Laborde was right? And he wanted to think of his wife, but she did not come: not even into his thoughts. Well, he had asked for that. "Probably," he said aloud to the moonlight, "I should now be a colonel and still happily married to Margery." As he said the word Margery it was like knocking on something that was completely hollow inside. But it was not so simple. For if Laborde were right then they who ask nothing and want nothing should have the Kingdom of Heaven and they who give not should wear the halo of the saints. He looked up towards the ridge but it was dark with shadows. He went in and thought that it was all a lot of rubbish, but before going to bed he drank half a tumblerful of neat whisky. He slept well.

Next morning Laborde left directly after breakfast, "I must make a confession," he said. "That story about the subaltern in Bombay isn't true. I read that story in a book but I thought it would sound more convincing if I said that I knew him."

(IV)

McKenna could not leave the farm before half-past eleven. A bullock had an abscess on its neck and that had to be attended to. After that the fundi, the carpenter, informed him that he was in trouble with a shed he was building. It would not rise in a straight line. The sun was almost up in the centre by the time he set out. He got to the gate and changed his mind and went back to the house and had a drink. Then he set out again and when he arrived he was not surprised when the house-boy told him that the memsahib was down in the garden beside the furrow. "I'll wait for her," he said.

He went on to the verandah and sat down and shortly after he got up and went over to the pram. The child was awake. He watched it idly. The child moved its right hand. That was somewhat surprising. To cry and to lie placidly without any driving force behind it had appeared to be its daily routine. Nevertheless, he had to admit, that the driving force had always been there and the moving arm was but another proof of it. He went nearer to the pram. The child saw him and looked at him earnestly, expectantly: and it smiled. McKenna blushed. The smile was luminous and it was huge in the small delicate face. He knew that he should say some endearing

words, or make a funny gesture; or something. But for the life of him he could not bring out the appropriate words; or any words. He walked away and the child began to shriek. He turned round and went back to the pram. The shrieking stopped and the smile appeared again. "You're a funny little chap," McKenna said and realized that it was not difficult to speak to the baby. "Now you mustn't make such awful noises, though, I suppose, you'll go on making awful noises for a long, long time. You see that dog? That's not really a dog. It's my private secretary. Of course you can't see it. Some other time you'll see him." And he talked on and the child was happy and fell asleep. McKenna moved away.

He stood at the end of the verandah and looked at the desolate view of the compound. The kitchen was in a poor way. The thatched roof was, so to speak, in rags. The refuse heap was formidably large and it should have been burnt days, if not weeks, ago. His attention was not, however, attracted by that familiar sight. He was watching three natives who were in high spirits and laughed a good deal. They were squatting on the dusty ground in front of the kitchen. Now and then one of them jumped forward and picked up an object McKenna could not see. The cook called from the kitchen and reluctantly the youngest of them got up and went in answer to the call. Now McKenna could see what they were doing. They were playing with the toy motor-car he had bought in Hyde Park. Either the spring was broken, or they did not know how to wind it up, anyhow there was no life left in the toy. They pushed it and when it turned over they shrieked with joy.

"I'm sorry," said Gloria's voice behind him, "but I thought you wouldn't come."

"It's for me to apologise for being late."

She looked pretty and fresh. The heat did not affect her looks. Taking everything into consideration Bignell and Laborde had not spoken of an unattractive proposition when they had advised him to marry her. She smiled timidly. She did not know what he wanted. He could not very well ask for the money back. He had said it was a present; moreover, he was not the type of person who asked for things back. Her mother had made a habit of asking for things back. Luckily, her mother and McKenna had nothing in common. That, she thought, was very encouraging.

"I see," McKenna said, "that your boys are having the time of their lives with that toy."

"I'll take it away from them."

"Don't bother. We must buy Davy some new toys."

"Kichuki," shouted Gloria, "bring that toy back." She was not

going to have any nonsense: she would not let him say that she did not let her child play with the toys he bought.

"If," she said to Kichuki, who held the dusty little object in his outstretched palm, "I ever see you playing with that again you'll see what will happen to you." She was looking at McKenna from the corner of her eye. She dismissed Kichuki. "Poor little Davy must have his motor-car back." The monkey was not in the car any more. Probably, thought McKenna, it had felt neglected and had gone back to Hyde Park. "Isn't he sweet?" Gloria asked as she deposited the filthy toy in the pram. "He's asleep, don't let us wake him." She said that in a stage whisper.

"Will you stay to luncheon?" she asked as they went into the sitting-room. "Please, do."

He said that he would stay to luncheon. The dachshund was sleeping in the largest easy chair. "Nobody is going to disturb my Hansi now," said Gloria. "Thank God he isn't here any more. He was a foul creature."

"Gloria, I've come to see you because I'm worried about you. I don't think the thousand pounds I let you have will see you through. Miles left things in a pretty hopeless state."

"It wasn't his fault."

"I didn't say it was. But we must look at it from a practical point of view."

"Perhaps I'd better show you my files," she said in an important voice.

"I should like to see them very much provided you don't mind."

If only he were not so polite! "I'll get them at once," she said and went out. She came back with a file from A to L. Apparently nobody from M to Z wrote to her or had dealings with the farm. But that was not so. Letters and bills were shoved into the file higgledy-piggledy with no regard to dates or names. She could not find what she wanted and that made her fidgety. She tried in her utter nervousness to put the blame on her own shoulders and exonerate the creditors.

"Oh those people are all right," she would say and McKenna would pick up the next letter in which they threatened her with proceedings. "This isn't important," she said as he lifted out an envelope. The envelope contained summonses.

"I haven't a cigarette," she said. That was not true but she was already past controlling her words.

"Here's a cigarette," he said.

She sat back and wanted to relax. "There are plenty of more summonses in that folder," she said. Let the whole thing crash down

on her. What was the good of going on like that? She said to herself that she was past caring. Nevertheless her hands trembled. "I'll get you a drink," she said and threw away the half-smoked cigarette. She left the room and stood in the little corridor and for a second she did not know why she had gone out. She went to her room and washed her face and made up. She looked at herself in the mirror above the washstand. She had a copper washstand and a copper jug and she considered them elegant and in excellent taste. She remembered that she had offered McKenna a drink. She hurried to the dining-room. There was no whisky left. McKenna and Laborde had finished off the bottle last night. She was running out of drinks, for she had not the courage to ask Bignell to put drinks down on her bill. But there was a half-bottle of gin and she took it to the sitting-room.

"There's only gin," she said.

"I'm very fond of gin," he said. "In fact, I never drink whisky before sundown."

"Miles used to drink whisky before sundown. It didn't seem to affect him." She wished she had not said that.

"He probably had a better constitution than I," McKenna said.

With a vicious jerk of her arm she poured out two drinks. They were large generous drinks.

"Gloria," McKenna said, "why don't you go back to England?"

"What do you mean?"

How that man could frighten her! Nobody should have the right to frighten her. "But I've told you I won't go back to England. I'd rather die."

"But I don't see any other way out."

"I have a hundred and fifty a year. That's the way out."

"I wish it were. But you have over three thousand pounds of pressing debts. But that isn't all. To turn the farm into a self-supporting proposition you'd have to invest at least another three thousand pounds. So you'd need six thousand pounds to start off with."

"I don't believe it."

"You must believe it."

"David, you're horrid." He said nothing. She waited but still he said nothing. "I'm talking like a fool," she said, "but surely it can't be so bad." She forgot that she had said that she had no cigarettes. She took out her case and lit up.

"I'll sell the farm," she said.

"You wouldn't even get enough to cover the mortgage."

"I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll sell half of the farm and give the money to my creditors and then they will wait."

"But there is water only on this end of the farm. Nobody would buy land without water. It's out of the question."

"Then what am I to do?"

"Let the whole thing blow up and go home. I'm quite ready to let you have the money to go home on and I can assure you that I'll help you with the education of your son. But if you stay here, even if you found six thousand pounds, you'd be in the same mess in a year's time. You're not a farmer and nobody should expect you to be a farmer. So please take my advice and go home."

"I can't. David, I can't." She burst into tears. As she was not the crying type her tears were large and sincere. They came like a mountain torrent in spring and her body shook and her sobs were loud and full of protest. You weep like that when you look down into an open, fresh grave.

"You mustn't cry like that," McKenna said. He stood up and because her tears did not cease he put his hand on her shoulder. Her shoulders heaved and his hand seemed to rise and fall like a small boat in a swell.

"Please give me a handkerchief," she said. He took out a handkerchief and gave it to her. With her right hand she wiped her eyes and the left hand in need of comfort touched his arm and held on to it as if to dear life.

"I don't want you to be unhappy," he said.

Out on the verandah the baby had woken up and was now crying too. It cried as loud as its mother and since the windows were open its sobs drifted in and mingled with those of Gloria. Somehow McKenna would not have been surprised if Miles's voice had come through calling for help or crying like the rest of his family.

"Is there really no way out?" she asked when she felt she could begin to control her tears.

"I don't see any." He said that loudly. He was not saying that to her: he was speaking to Bignell and Laborde. "The baby is crying," he added.

"Yes," she said in a discouraged voice. She got up slowly, almost painfully. She went out on to the verandah and the baby catching sight of her shrieked louder. "I think," she said in utter misery, "that I must change his nappy." She took the child and went to the nursery and when she returned she said, "How could anybody expect me to run the farm and to change nappies every five minutes?" She put the child back into the pram.

"Nobody in his right senses could expect you to do both," he said,

She started to cry again. "I'll have to feed him in half an hour. We . . . we'd better eat first." She dried her eyes. "I don't think I can eat. David, I'm going to kill myself if I have to go back to England." She stood there in the middle of the room and tears trickled into her smiling mouth.

"I could let you have more money," he said, "but we'd have the same talk in a few months' time. It won't help."

"Apparently it won't. Pour me out a drink." She took the drink and spilled a little gin. "There is nothing left in the world for me," she said and he felt that she was speaking the truth. She was before a wall and nothing could break through it and if the wall collapsed, it would, in a curious manner, collapse on her. And she was a pathetic, desirable woman standing there in the middle of the room. The child had started to wail.

"I can only see one way out," he said, "Marry me."

She stared at him hard. "What did you say?" she asked very slowly.

"I said that there is only one way out for you if you don't want to go back to England and that's to marry me."

"But David, I'm Miles's wife."

He smiled. "I'm not going to compete with Miles. I suggest that you should marry me because I want you to be rid of all your worries and troubles. You must have a safe home and you need relaxation. I know you don't care for me as one would expect a woman to care under such circumstances. We both have our eyes open and you're a pleasant companion and I am certain that I wouldn't regret it. I shall do my best that you shouldn't regret it."

As he said that, choosing every word carefully he began to feel an overwhelming desire for her and for an instant he feared that his desire would choke him the way drink might if swallowed quickly.

"I think you've suffered a lot and you deserve a break," he went on in an uncertain voice.

The baby was now shrieking. "He isn't sick, is he?" McKenna asked.

(V)

Betty waited patiently for her husband to finish his after luncheon coffee. "I think I'll have another cup," he said.

She nodded. That would give her ten minutes less rest. "When are you going to Nakuru?" she asked.

"To-morrow. Do you mind?"

"Not in the slightest," she said and that must have reminded her of something, for she smiled.

"I promised Nicholson to play with him to-morrow," Reggie said.

"To-morrow will be as good a day as any."

Her husband had a very conventional outlook on marriage in general and on their own marriage in particular. One must humour one's wife, one must always give the impression that she comes first, and one must behave somewhat boyishly in order to keep the maternal instinct burning. Now the boy with the false teeth laughed.

"It's going to be such fun," he said. Once a week he drove to Nakuru to play golf.

"I'm going to lie down for an hour," Betty said. "Don't forget to look at the incubator. Last time the chicks all died in it."

"They won't die this time. But, darling one, it wasn't the chicks, it was the eggs."

"Instead of a hundred and three you kept it at a hundred and five."

"Never again, I promise, never again." He jumped up and opened the door for her. He could hardly refrain from laughing. How clever he was. Other husbands had to heel and to haw but he always had his way with the old girl. That was on account of his subtle diplomacy. He could take a day off whenever he wanted. Could play all the golf in the world. Incidentally, if he had known how little Betty cared about his absence he might have been surprised and even chagrined.

Betty slept in the afternoon on a sofa in her bedroom. She took her brogues off and moved her toes in utter middle-aged comfort. She arranged the pillows under her head. To be accurate: she built a little mountain of cushions. She lay down and started to read the fifth chapter of a novel of imposing bulk. It was by Sir Hugh Walpole. She read for fifteen minutes and then she shut the book, with a perfect aim she threw it on the table, she turned on her side and curled up and fell asleep. In a short while she was snoring harshly. When Gloria came into the room she was lying on her back and the snores kept her mouth wide open.

"Darling," Gloria said and shook her shoulder.

"Go to hell," Betty said. She said that without rancour. "Oh it's you," she said and gave Gloria a friendly smile. "Gosh, my mouth is parched. What's the time?"

"Three."

"You're early."

"The most amazing thing has happened. Darling, I don't know how to begin."

"Begin."

"David came over this morning and he looked at the accounts. Then he asked me to marry him."

"What?" Betty jumped up. "It's wonderful. It's the most marvellous thing I've heard for ages. You'll be able to have ten nurses if you want to. Darling, I am happy."

"I'm not going to marry him."

"You're mad, stark raving mad."

"I'm not going to marry him. Do you realize that Miles hasn't been dead for six months?"

"So what?" Betty said vulgarly.

"So what? Do you think I'd marry six months after Miles's death? I'd rather be dead."

"You're the biggest fool in the world."

"And I don't love him. I only love Miles."

"You bore me stiff," Betty said. She walked to the window, opened the shutter and came back. "Look here, Gloria," she said, "I'm your friend and I was willing to stand by you through thick and thin. Now such luck has come your way that you ought to go down on your knees and thank God for His kindness. If you refuse to marry David I'm never going to speak to you again."

Gloria was impressed. "He said," she said, "that I needn't be a wife in the ordinary sense. He doesn't expect me to love him. He said he wants to save me from my troubles and worries, and that's all."

"I think he's even a bigger fool than I thought him to be," Betty laughed because she was moved and did not want to show it. "And what was your answer?"

"I said that he must let me think it over."

"Why didn't you tell him to ask mama, you sap. Listen, you go straight to him and tell him that you're ready to marry him to-morrow."

"But, darling, what will Miles say?"

"I don't know what Miles will say. Probably where he is at present he hasn't much to say. He got you into the mess and you ought to thank your lucky stars that David has come along to get you out of it."

"But I don't want to be called Mrs. McKenna. I don't like the Scotch."

"Go to hell."

Gloria looked at her and saw that Betty was not joking.

"If," went on Betty, "I had to choose between your Miles and David, I'd choose David."

"Darling, how can you say that. He isn't human that man."

"He's too good to be human."

"I won't marry him."

"Gloria, my dear, there's the door. Get out. I really don't want to see you again."

Gloria made no effort to get out. She remained standing, irresolute, watching Betty, hoping that she would relent. But Betty was not in the mood to relent.

"Didn't you hear me? Get out."

Gloria took a step forward. "You really mean that?"

"I mean that. I know it's no good telling you that you should think of your child because you're too egotistic to be a decent mother."

"That isn't true. I'm thinking of the child. You know I am."

"In that case you must say yes."

"But it's so ridiculous."

"That's definitely one way of putting it."

"If I married him would I have to go and live in his house?"

"No, you ass. You'd stay in that filthy hovel of yours till the roof crashed on you. I hope it's going to crash on you soon."

The door opened noiselessly and Reggie stood there grinning.

"Heard your voice so I thought you were awake. Hullo Gloria."

"Leave us alone you big ape," Betty shouted. Reggie tiptoed away.

"Now then," Betty said, "make your mind up and make it up quickly."

"All right darling," sighed Gloria, "I'm going to marry him. But I'm going to tell him that he has to wait for another six months."

"And change his mind in the meanwhile?"

"But, darling, what will people say if I married him six months after my husband's death?"

"He's a rich man and the heir of a baronet, who, I understand, is a sickly creature. People will say that you're damned lucky; and you know you're damned lucky."

(VI)

The sun had wished to linger above the swamp, but now it was going gently though purposefully. A small breeze arose, as if to speed him on his way. The umbrella thorns swayed a bit; and with the basset hound sleeping happily McKenna sat under his tree. Gloria had gone back half an hour ago. She had said she would marry him and she also said that she would do her best and be a good wife to him. "I appreciate your kindness very much," she had said. He looked up at the tree, then he patted the dog and wondered if the basset hound

would mind if the dachshund came to live with them. Gloria had given him such a shy friendly kiss before she left. She had such a fresh smell. Suddenly he thought of that prostitute in London, then of Muriel and then he wanted Gloria. And he would marry her. And then as he lay there he could almost hear horses trotting, the sounds of hoofs going clop, clop.

Margery had been one of those rare creatures, a real blonde. She had blue eyes and a white skin and her fair hair made her skin whiter and perhaps deepened the blue of her eyes. She had looked splendid on horseback. She was a good horsewoman too and in those days he felt still very sure of himself on horseback, for she had not yet told him that he looked like a monkey on a horse. The rich sky of Ceylon was like a triumphal arch above them; and no wonder: yesterday he had asked her to marry him. Her father was a high official in the Secretariat and it was expected that he would become a Colonial Secretary in time. Clap, clap, the hoofs went and surely Margery had said nice things to him that morning but now he could only see her lips moving and not a sound emerged. He leaned forward and as he looked down from within the shadow of the umbrella thorn he saw Betty trotting resolutely towards the house. She looked somewhat square on horseback.

"Come," he said and the basset hound awoke and the retrievers and the nondescript terrier caught up with them as they neared the house. "David, I'm simply dying to talk to you," Betty said.

"Come in," he said, "and have a drink."

"It's too early for me."

"Do you mind if I have one?"

"Go ahead."

Betty stood before the window and then turned round and took in the room. "I've always said this is a very nice room," she said, "but it's a little austere. Don't you agree that it's a little austere?"

"Very likely it is."

"A woman in this room will make all the difference," Betty said fatuously, and McKenna saw before him a stuffed woman standing beside the fireplace, holding an urn which had a lamp on top of it. A pair would probably be better.

Ali came in and he thought that he would have to tell Ali that Memsahib Wace would come there and live as his wife. Ali put the tray down and muttered something to himself about good luck and went out of the room.

"It's simply marvellous," Betty said, "David, I'm so glad."

He bowed stiffly and hated his stiffness. "I'm sure," Betty con-

tinued, "that you're going to make our Gloria happy. She deserves it, poor child."

There before his eyes the boys were playing with the mechanical toy and the baby was wailing in the pram. "I'm so terribly glad," Betty said.

"You really won't have a drink?"

"No, thank you. Drink blows me up."

He poured out a stiff drink for himself and she watched him toss it down. Though, generally speaking, she disapproved of stiff drinks, now she eyed him with indulgence. The nervous male: one must forgive him. "Between you and me," she said omitting the lamp post, "I think you're a very lucky man. Gloria is such a pretty and sweet person."

Gloria had long, well shaped legs. They were before his eyes, alone, as if they were an advertisement for stockings.

"I think," he said, "that was the only solution under the circumstances."

"You don't express yourself very poetically."

"I want to help her and our relationship will be based on that."

"Now come David," Betty said, "you know as well as I that such high-falutin sentiments only exist in novels. I bet that in a year's time you and Gloria will be as loving a couple as there ever was."

"I imagined that that sort of happy ending only happened in novels."

Betty laughed but it was not a convincing laugh. The trouble with him was that he was not really a fool, yet he was a man. Rather disturbing; like a deaf and dumb person suddenly beginning to speak, but speaking queerly because he cannot hear his own words.

"When are you getting married?" she asked.

"I don't know. We haven't discussed it."

Betty jumped up. "You leave the whole thing to me. I'll fix up everything. Please let me fix it up. That'll save Gloria the trouble and you won't have to bother about it either. Just leave it to me."

"That's very kind of you."

Betty began to think aloud: "It's no good waiting, the sooner the better, a simple wedding, then a fortnight's honeymoon."

"A honeymoon?"

"Of course. You can't get married and then just come back here. You'll have to go on a honeymoon. I know a marvellous place on the coast. North of Mombasa. You'll love it. Absolutely romantic."

"But I've told you that ours won't be the sort of marriage. . . ."

"All right, then sleep in different rooms." She winked obscenely.

Jokes about the nuptial bed are not smutty: they are proper and highly respectable. "You must go on a honeymoon."

"But what will happen to the child in the meantime? One can't leave him with that boy. I don't think that boy's any good."

"We'll get him a good competent nurse. High-time he had a nurse. Such a sweet baby. I'll find you the nurse; and as one shouldn't leave a white woman on a farm alone, she and the baby will come and stay with me till the wedding."

"You're very kind, Betty."

"Oh, I'm all right. I'm enjoying this. I suppose you'll get married in an R.C. church. You're an R.C. aren't you?"

"Yes, but I can't marry in church. It must be a registry office."

"Why can't you get married in a church? It's so much more romantic."

"Because I was married in church."

"What?" She took a step forward and looked at him as though he had suddenly vanished and somebody of different stature had taken his place, preferably with a blue beard. "What?" she asked again. It was more like an exclamation. "You were married before?"

"Yes."

"Are you divorced?"

"Of course. My wife divorced me."

"Well, that's something. I couldn't have coped very well with bigamy." He smiled. "Does Gloria know that you were married before?"

"I don't know. I don't think I told her. But I'm not sure."

"You must tell her. It's your duty."

"In that case I shall tell her."

"Who was your first wife? Why did she divorce you? What did she look like?" The questions tumbled out almost in a heap.

"She was very good looking and we weren't happy. In fact, she wasn't. But all that happened many years ago and honestly I don't think it would interest you to hear the details."

"Thank you for putting me in my place," Betty said good-humouredly. "Probably it will help you in your second marriage that you have had the experience of an unsuccessful marriage."

"That's very possible."

"I always imagined you were the typical bachelor."

He poured himself out another drink. "Come and lunch with us to-morrow," she said. "By then I'll have all my plans ready. Do you want to tell Gloria about your having been married before, or would it be better if I told her?"

"Do as you please."

You don't, she thought, get much change out of him. She was ready to go. "You know old Tatton?" He said he knew him. "He said he thinks we're in for a drought."

"That depends on the short rains."

He accompanied Betty to her horse and stood there till she turned the corner and had stopped waving her whip, an exercise her horse didn't particularly cherish. He went indoors, had another drink, put a bottle of whisky into his car and drove to Laborde. He knew that Laborde would be with Adams; but to-night he did not feel like wanting to see Adams.

Laborde's house, though built of cedar logs and covered with papyrus thatch, was a neat little house. A young native woman, wearing slacks, was sitting on the steps. As she saw the car approaching she got up and walked away. McKenna went into the sitting-room. The sitting-room walls were full of photographs. There was a picture of the late Mrs. Laborde. A homely woman with not a very intelligent face. Then there were many group pictures. They were the landmarks of Laborde's military career. There were photographs of him in uniform and another with him standing on a shot elephant. Even prostrate the elephant was so immense that Laborde looked like a pigmy standing there so triumphantly holding his rifle.

A couple of mongrels came to the door and growled at the basset hound who pretended not to notice them. Still growling they entered the room and sat down at a respectful distance. One of them, somewhat resembling an Airedale, came forward at last, but lost courage half-way and returned to his mate. It was now the basset hound's turn to make advances. Both mongrels began to growl and the basset hound stopped, tail wagging and whimpering a little. McKenna found a glass and poured out a drink. He sat there drinking and watched the dogs. Eventually one of the mongrels began to bark harshly. That, instead of intimidating him, gave the basset hound new courage, and soon the three of them were walking round the room like a procession in slow motion, and there was quick tail wagging, sniffing and smelling, here and there a growl, and then the one that resembled an Airedale lifted his leg against the curtain. The basset hound followed suit, nor did the third member of the party lag behind. The noise of a car became audible and the mongrels ran out barking and the basset hound returned to McKenna, put his head on his knee and waxing sentimental pressed his jaw hard against the knee.

"What a pleasant surprise," Laborde said. "And you've brought a bottle of whisky." He mopped his dignified high forehead. "You'll stay for dinner. We'll have bushbuck. Shot it yesterday."

"I've taken your advice," McKenna said. "I'm going to marry Gloria."

"You're not drunk, are you?" Laborde asked facetiously.

"I'm a little drunk, nevertheless, I'm going to marry her."

"I don't believe it."

"But you said I should marry her. You said there was no other way out."

"But I was only joking."

"I'm not joking. I'm going to marry her because there is no other way out for her. Whether there is a way out for me or not I don't know. Give me a drink. You're the host."

Laborde gave him a drink and mumbled that perhaps it would all work out well in the end. He was distressed. "I hope your marriage won't interfere with our friendship," he said a little later.

"You know it won't."

"I'm glad to hear that, very glad. Mind you," he went on in a much more cheerful voice, "I can't imagine Adams dining with you and your bride."

"I'll go and see Adams instead."

They got drunk both of them. They forgot about dinner and when there was no more whisky left they drank beer. "My dear fellow," said Laborde, as he staggered to the car, "I wish you luck. She's pretty and she has seen what it means to go through hell. It'll be all right, I can assure you. Provided," he belched loudly, "provided our friendship remains un . . ." he belched again, "forgive me, undisturbed."

McKenna drove off and Laborde found his way to his bedroom. The black girl was there. "Get out," he said and collapsed on his bed. He woke up in the night and thought that if he lost McKenna then Adams would be in the same boat with him. That cheered him up no end.

PART FOUR

(I)

THE PALM TREES RAN IN A STRAIGHT LINE TO THE beach. The beach was a mass of soft sand and because of the damp heat the sea was of a nondescript blue. Therefore one could not see where the beach ended and the sea began: and it mattered little. Captain Robinson stood in the doorway of the hotel. He was thin and anæmic and had that Cockney pallor of Italian origin. You felt that he would not live for long; but he had looked like that for many years. An Arab stood beside him, dark and dignified, and watched Captain Robinson lighting a cheap Dutch cigar. "Good?" the Arab asked.

"Good," said Captain Robinson. They were speaking in Swahili which here on the coast was far richer and only slightly resembled the settler's Swahili of the Highlands.

"I am going," the Arab said. Captain Robinson took the cigar from his mouth and said nothing. "So you will pay that bill next month," said the Arab.

"Next month,"

The Arab went away and Captain Robinson watched him till he was out of sight, then swore at him vulgarly and silently. He put the cigar back into his mouth and went into the hotel. It was a small hotel about twenty miles north of Mombasa. Captain Robinson was in charge of the hotel which belonged to a wealthy man living in Nairobi. The captain and the hotel did not get on well together: for he was a man of firm laziness, whereas the hotel needed a lot of attention. Moreover, he liked drinking and it is easy to drink with a well stocked bar at one's beck and call. Though he was the first to put the blame on temptation, he never went out of his way to evade temptation; in fact he did not dislike meeting it. Naturally the owner would sooner or later find out that he was not paying the bills; since it was a matter of time Captain Robinson refused to make too much bad blood about it. The proprietor was under the impression that the bills were met. But how could he pay bills regularly if he drank about half of the whisky he was supposed to sell? That was a problem of the first order and Captain Robinson was too lazy to grapple with it. Lately, however, his nerves had not been as good as they used to be. Now and then he would get frightened and panic was not far from him. Perhaps it was the weather or his liver, he did not know, but

his bonhomie and equanimity were slipping and he had many sleepless nights.

The lounge was empty. He opened the door that led to the verandah which was stuffy because of the low roof, and the bougainvillea kept the air out. The missionary and his wife were drinking tea. They had been staying for over a fortnight. The missionary had told him that he and his wife came from Tanganyika and that they would go up country soon. He said that every day and Captain Robinson reached the conclusion that there was something fishy about the missionary. Why should they stay at the hotel and every day postpone their departure? Definitely fishy. Probably missionary and bloody wife would go off without paying bill.

Wait a moment. He began to wonder whether he could make out a bogus bill after their departure and shove some of his own drinks on to the bill. No good. It would not sound probable that a missionary drank a couple of bottles a day. And even that would make less than thirty bottles. Thirty bottles were but a drop. Still, the missionary might come in useful in the end. You never knew. To begin with he must find out what was the trouble with the missionary. Captain Robinson was not the man to shrink from a little blackmail, provided no danger was attached to it.

"It looks as if it were cooler this evening," the missionary said.

"Are you leaving to-morrow?" Captain Robinson asked. He watched the missionary intently.

"I don't know. We might postpone our departure. I'll tell you to-night."

"If you're expecting a letter then you'd better give up hope. There isn't any post to-night."

"No, I'm not expecting a letter."

Captain Robinson suddenly decided that he would get to the bottom of the mystery. He pulled up a chair and sat down. The missionary was about forty but he appeared younger. He wore gold rimmed spectacles and had weak thin lips. He endeavoured to look eager and hearty but there was a good deal of tiredness about him. His wife was plain and about thirty-five. She had her hair brushed back and had practically no eyelashes. She seemed a taciturn sort of woman. She was meticulously clean and smelt of carbolic soap. Captain Robinson often thought that the life of a hermit must be preferable to bedding with a woman like that.

"It was a hot day," he said conversationally.

"Indeed it was," the missionary said eagerly.

"I can never make out what you blokes really are."

"I don't follow you," the missionary said half apologetically.

"I never know whether a bloke is a C. of E. or a Methodist or what."

"I'm a Church of England missionary," the missionary said.

"I see," Captain Robinson said examining his cigar carefully.

"It's funny," he went on, "but there used to be quite a lot of trouble with one of you blokes. He came to Kenya and the C. of E. people didn't want to have anything to do with him. You know, the Bishop of Mombasa and big shots like that. So he just hung about and ran up bills and got into a lot of trouble." He was staring hard at the missionary. "That bloke came from the Soudan and apparently had no business to come here. Took the law into his hand, what?" The missionary smiled and nodded and Captain Robinson was disappointed because he did not look guilty. "I can understand the bishop's point of view. Imagine if an officer left his unit and went to another unit just on his own." He laughed but his eye did not leave the missionary's face. "I bet that bloke must have felt pretty cheap at the end of the whole business." The missionary nodded non-committally. "Calling himself a missionary and had no right to do so."

"The poor man," said the missionary, "might have had a reason for acting like that. We must always give the benefit of the doubt. Nevertheless I do believe that if you can't obey your superiors any longer you should give up your work." He smiled at his wife. "If we are entrusted with looking after a garden it is our duty to make the garden look pretty, if I may use such a commonplace metaphor."

Captain Robinson nodded and then bit his upper lip. He had a thorough contempt for missionaries and their type of talk made him feel sick. Garden indeed.

"But now and again," went on the missionary, "there might come a gardener who hasn't the necessary strength left and in that case it is preferable if he gives up his work."

The gardener! A lot of drivel and he was not getting any information out of the man. "Well, let me know when you decide to move on," he said.

"We hope to go in a day or two," the missionary smiled at his wife. "I gather you have some new visitors arriving."

"Major McKenna and his wife. He's a real sahib. An army man like me. Lives somewhere up country. He's lousy with money and he's the brother of a baronet."

"There are indeed some lucky people in this world," the missionary said. He wilfully ignored the word lousy.

Captain Robinson had had enough of him. The commercial traveller had gone into the bar, so he went in. "A large scotch," said the traveller.

Captain Robinson poured out a drink for him then a drink for himself. "I'd better stand you that one," said the traveller.

"How's business?" Captain Robinson asked graciously.

"I wish to God I was back home in Durban. But business isn't bad."

"I'm glad to hear that," said Captain Robinson and poured another drink out for himself.

"What's business like in this hotel?" the traveller asked.

"Rotten."

"It's your own fault. Ought to put more pep into the running of it. You ought to see some of our hotels in Durban."

You dirty Colonial, said Captain Robinson under his breath.

"You ought to see some of the hotels we have in London," he said aloud. "Your Durban hotels would look like shenzi huts beside them."

"They wouldn't be much good if they were run like this one," said the traveller hurt in his Colonial pride.

The P.W.D. engineer came in and Captain Robinson went to serve him. The engineer had a drink and then left. Captain Robinson returned to the traveller. "That's a nice chap," he said pointing to the retreating figure of the engineer. "Was an officer like me." The traveller did not answer and Captain Robinson felt he had put him in his place. "An officer and a gentleman," he said loudly and drank more whisky. Then he called the steward and went out.

(II)

"It looks rather sweet," Gloria said. "You can always trust Betty's taste." She held the dachshund on the leash. She had been adamant on bringing Hansi along. McKenna had suggested that it would be too hot for the dog. She replied that she must have her Hansi with her. Hansi now looked up at Captain Robinson, who remembered that in the days when he had been acting corporal, dachshunds were booed on patriotic grounds.

"My name's McKenna."

"I guessed you were Major McKenna. Mrs Newton who stayed here last year booked two rooms for you. Two rooms at your orders, Major." Captain Robinson laughed a military laugh. "Nice chap Captain Newton." He spoke breezily.

The rooms were large with scanty furniture. The mosquito nets over the windows seemed to keep the light and the air out; the mosquito nets over the beds were rather dirty. "I'll leave you Major," Captain Robinson said.

"What a horrid, common man," Gloria said after the captain withdrew.

"I hope you'll like it here," McKenna said.

"I know I'll love it. Betty simply raved about this place."

She went to the window and peeped out through the net. "It's so lovely to see the sea again. Do you know I haven't seen the sea for six years? I love the sea. Miles loved the sea too."

She blushed because she should not have said that. She turned away from the window and looked at McKenna, but he did not appear to mind. "I shouldn't have said that," she said in an endearing voice, "but it seemed so natural." She was putting her foot into it more and more. She wished she could stop. "Still you were Miles's friend and so I knew you wouldn't mind my speaking of him."

"Of course I don't mind. There's a bar here. Come and have a drink when you're ready."

"I'd love to have a drink." She was grateful to him. He would not impose on her. He was a type she could not place but she was the first to admit that he had fine qualities. She waited till he closed the door of his room and then she smiled. The situation was not without its piquancy. As a young girl she had been a great reader and she had loved romance. Elinor Glyn was one of her favourite authors. This was a situation that could have come straight from an Elinor Glyn book. Though it was a thousand times a pity that the hero was McKenna and not Miles. In a little while she heard McKenna closing the outer door of his room and she went to her suit case, opened it and unpacked.

McKenna came into the bar and the traveller said good evening to him. He said good evening too and ordered a drink. The steward was a Madagascar boy and he was glad that Ali would have congenial company. Gloria wanted to take her boy Kichuki along. He, however, was resolved to take Ali and wisely Gloria did not press the point, and as Ali was an excellent servant she soon forgot about Kichuki. McKenna had no complaints to make. She had been amenable and easy to manage. They were married in Nairobi and the Newtons were their witnesses. Reggie had cracked many a joke behind his teeth. They took train to Mombasa and they arrived in the morning and now there they were. Betty was a first-class organizer and he was grateful to her. He had not liked the nanny. She was oldish, and reminded him of a witch out of a German fairy tale. And she was a Theosophist. But she had excellent references and seemed capable in a slightly repulsive fashion. He wondered if the baby would smile at her. He doubted it. Gloria came into the bar. She looked ravishingly young.

"I like this bar," she said. Later Captain Robinson took over from the steward and was effusive and chatty. When they went to dine Gloria said, "I can't stand that man."

"I wouldn't bother about him."

She smiled and looked round the dining-room. It was a gloomy place. There were six tables. The missionary and his wife sat at a corner table. She sat straight and silent. He was speaking to her but you only saw his lips move and that irritated Gloria. The traveller was reading a book and ate loudly. The kerosene light was harsh and at the same time lugubrious. Captain Robinson put in an appearance. He stood in the doorway and then he went up to McKenna. "Everything okay?"

"Yes, thank you."

He sat down at the next table and talked to them during the meal. When they were at the end of their meal he said, "There is a cosy little lounge on the other side of the bar. Why don't you have your coffee and liqueurs there?" He gave the missionary and his wife a haughty look; for they were not the sort of people who took liqueurs with their coffee. The lounge was small and humidly hot. The missionary and his wife sat side by side on a couch and when the steward came to take their orders he said, "A pot of tea." He turned to his wife, talked to her, but only his lips moved.

"What dull people," Gloria said. The steward brought the coffee and she sat back and yawned. "I'm beginning to relax," she said; and McKenna thought that she had a knack of saying things one could not answer.

"I wonder," he said, "how the nanny is getting on with the child."

"I thought she was a very competent woman."

"I hope you're right. Personally I didn't like her."

"Because she has a crooked nose?"

"I wasn't thinking of her nose."

Gloria laughed and the missionary looked up, gave them the sort of smile that says I understand your fun and join in it at a distance.

"She said to me," McKenna said, "that the baby should be made to sit up every day for at least an hour."

"Did she?" Gloria yawned. "I'm going to sleep marvellously to-night."

"The nanny said that you should have made him sit up before."

"Yes, she told me that too."

"Then why didn't you?" He smiled as he said that. He did not wish to sound harsh.

"Because I didn't know."

"I see."

"May I have another drink?"

He rang the bell and ordered her another drink. They sat in silence and it seemed to him that it was exceedingly pleasant to be sitting with her like that. She drank her liqueur and yawned for a third time "It's amazing to be near the sea after all these years," she said in a grateful voice. "I'm going to bed." She blushed because she remembered that this man was her husband and if he so desired could come to her room. "I know I'm going to fall asleep at once," she said in a loud unnatural voice.

"I hope you'll sleep well."

She saw that the missionary and his wife were getting ready to leave the room. So she went out quickly because she did not want to leave the room with them. "Good night," the missionary said with a bright smile. "Good night," he said to McKenna who went out through the door leading to the bar. The bar was empty. The steward sat behind the counter, half asleep. He roused himself and that cost him a considerable effort. Mosquitoes hummed their aggressive evensong. Captain Robinson came in about ten minutes later. He was full of drink but he carried his drink well. "Enjoying yourself, Major?" he asked.

McKenna stood him a drink. Captain Robinson was an observant man. He had summed up McKenna pretty shrewdly and had decided that he would refrain from calling himself a retired regular army officer in his presence. The "I was an officer in the last war" stunt would work better. "I take it," he said, "that you were a regular."

"Yes, I was in the regular army."

"I wish I had been. Or I wish I hadn't been made a captain in the war. You have one on me, Major."

"Thank you."

"It's like that," Captain Robinson said after he had poured out the drinks. "A bloke like me goes into the army, makes a good soldier, is promoted from the ranks, eats in the mess, has a batman, is treated like a sahib, then is demobbed and has his rank of a captain like a halter round his neck." He sighed. "Because you've got to go on behaving like a sahib. I often feel like one of those grand dukes who become taxi drivers." McKenna raised his glass to hide a smile. "Life since I left the army has been just bloody hell. I tell you frankly that I don't come from a posh family, but when I was an officer I was as good as anybody else."

"But aren't you now?"

"No. But I always think that because I was an officer I must watch my steps not to let the army down." He was satisfied. It was a neat approach.

"That's a very praiseworthy sentiment," McKenna said and wondered whether Captain Robinson had even been an N.C.O.

"But don't you think you attach too much importance to it?"

"Probably you're right." He sighed. "Probably you're right."

So far so good, and he would go no further to-night. He opened a drawer and took out a box of cigars, selected one and lit it. "I wish to God I'd never been a bloomin' officer. Good night, Major. The steward will look after you."

It would be, he thought, at least a fiver, or may be more; and since he was in a good mood he reached the sudden conviction that McKenna might pay off all his debts. He whistled and crashed into his room where a bottle of whisky awaited him.

McKenna that night undressed quickly, put on his pyjamas and sat down on his bed. He lit a cigarette and became aware of the fact that he had no desire to go to bed. Gloria's door faced the bed.

What did that seedy man want from him? He knew his type. Very likely he had never been to the war at all. He lifted his head. He heard footsteps in the next room, then there was silence. Apparently Gloria was only now going to bed. In the train that morning she had opened one of her suit-cases to take out something or other. She lifted quite a few articles out of the suit-case and one of them was a nightgown. It had a low neck. At the time he had not taken much notice of it. Now, however, that he imagined her wearing it, he saw the nightgown clearly, and that rather soft white skin of hers must be showing; it was the colour of the nightgown. When he used to go to see her in the nursing home she was wearing a nightgown like that. Once as she leaned forward he had seen her breasts. Now he saw them, too.

He shifted and tried to concentrate on Robinson. Possibly he was an embezzler or just a plain crook. The whole conversation must have been a prelude to asking for money. The bed creaked in the next room. It was hot. She must be turning on the other side. In the Highlands it was cold at night. But here it was hot, very hot. Well, there was not much one could do for a man like Robinson. The bed creaked again. Here he was hot and the mosquitoes were all over the room, but on the other side of the wall was Gloria with her white, young, fresh breasts and the door was closed. Behind another door was Captain Robinson trying to work out a scheme to get money out of him. The moist, breathless heat was like a heap of bricks filling the room. He turned on his side, but it was hot and Gloria had a beautiful body, such long legs, and what he liked about her mouth was that it was so soft. Probably if you kissed her your lips would lose themselves in that softness. And her lips were fresh,

They must be fresh even on a night like this. All he wanted was not to be so hot. And to sleep. But he could not. He turned on his back and tried to find his cigarette case. His hand groped around the table and he could not find it. He switched on the light. The cigarette case was behind the lamp. He took the case and opened it. It was empty. There must be a packet in his suit-case.

He got out of bed and far away a door banged. The suit-case was on a chair near the window. Instead of going to the suit-case he opened her door. He opened it stealthily and his hand trembled on the knob. There was dead silence in her room. He did not have to grope his way to the bed. He found it instinctively. He put out his hand and it touched her left shoulder and then the hand immediately travelled down to her breast. It was better like that.

"What is it?" Gloria asked in the slightly high-pitched tone of those who are awakened suddenly. "Don't touch me." But his other arm was round her and he was pressing her to him. "Don't touch me," she cried. "You promised not to touch me. Go away."

She began to fight him. She was strong and somehow there was not much strength in him. "Leave me, go away." And she whispered fiercely, "You promised to leave me alone." She clung to that promise while she was pushing him away. "I hate you, I hate you."

She fought hard and then he gave her a push. It was a hard push and she fell back and she knew that he was stronger than she. She waited for him to take advantage of it, but nothing happened. She did not even hear him leave the room. She heard the door close and that was all. He must have been drinking heavily; otherwise he would not have dared to come in like that. Despicable creature. She remembered how stupid he had looked the night he had been drunk. She had to tell Miles to send him away. Miles. If only Miles were here. Miles would not have let him. He would have beaten that creature within an inch of his life. She wanted to cry because there was no Miles to defend her. Nevertheless she had defended herself, so she did not cry. A little later she cried herself to sleep.

(III)

Next morning things looked more difficult. A sense of dismay and discomfort came over her the moment she awoke. She would see him in a short time. It was not like throwing a stranger out of your bed. He was her husband, he had paid her debts, and because her father had specialised in divorce, she was aware that if she went on behaving like that he could get rid of her, and then all there would be left for her to do would be to go back to her mother, and on top of it

everybody would laugh at her. It was a sorry state of affairs. And he was good to her: very good.

She rose and went to the window. He must be in love with her. Funny, but she had not thought of that before. You did not think of him and of love in the same breath. He had been good to her. But one is always good to people when one is in love with them. The sea was breathless with heat and the moist air floated above the sea and the palms seemed to shrink. She began to wonder whether it was true that one is good to people one loves. Had Miles been good to her? He had left her in a nice mess, she must admit that. Still, he had been fun and he had given her love, and he had been kind.

When she was dressed she rang for Ali.

"Is the Bwana up?"

"He goes to walk."

That hardly helped matters. She dismissed Ali and made her face up carefully. A couple of dirty clouds appeared but there was a small breeze. She would go swimming. That was a wonderful idea. She would go down to the beach and have a real swim. She had not had one for donkey's years. She opened a suit-case and took out her swimming suit. Probably it was no longer fashionable. She changed into it and put on her dressing-gown. It had a faded and unfashionable elegance. She left her room.

The missionary was carrying a breakfast tray to his wife. Had these people no servant? She came out and walked towards the beach. It was cooler under the palms. She found it delicious to walk in the sand. It was so soft. She decided to sit down for a few minutes and have a cigarette. Her first cigarette this morning. The first cigarette was the first real pleasure of the morning. As she sat in the sand with the smoke hardly rising she thought of Betty. Betty would be absolutely bloodsme about this business. She would take good care not to tell her. Then she saw a head in the water. She hoped it was not McKenna. The head loomed larger and then the man got to his feet and that upset her, for it was McKenna.

Her first reaction was to run away. However, she had not the guts to get up. He was coming towards her and she had to admit that he had a good figure. He only noticed her when he was a few yards from her.

"Come down for a swim?" he asked.

"Yes," she said. She was not looking at him. Nothing on earth would induce her to look at him.

"I'm frightfully sorry about last night," he said. "It won't happen again."

"I'm very sorry too," she said.

"Let's not talk about it any more."

She looked up. His face was blank.

"What time do you want breakfast?" he asked.

"In half an hour. I won't be long."

"There's no hurry."

She got up and he said that he had left his dressing-gown somewhere and would go and find it. She walked towards the sea which lapped the sand as a cat's tongue cautiously touches too hot milk. Once she glanced back. He had found his dressing-gown. He was not looking at her and that irritated her. To burst into her room and next morning not even to watch her going down the beach. The water was cool and she forgot her annoyance. She was a good swimmer. She swam for a while and then she floated on her back. What would Betty say? Betty would not forgive her. Forgive her for what? He had said that he would always leave her alone. Then another thought came to her: had she behaved the night before as a woman of the world? She was sensitive on that point. She was not sure about it. There was something positively vulgar about grappling with a man. The fact that the man happened to be her husband did not improve matters. In her favourite type of romance those bedroom fights usually ended up with the woman yielding. Yielding was the word. Well, she had not yielded. And she never would. But what was Betty going to say about it?

She started to swim back to the shore. She was worried: she did not mind dribbles of drama and spoonfuls of tragedy. As she reached the shore it seemed to her disheartening to have to go on and on like that and it would be tiring. She was a sensible girl and she was aware that it would be pleasant for neither of them. She threw her dressing gown round her shoulders, found her packet of cigarettes, lit a cigarette and walked back to the hotel. The swim had been splendid: she felt young and fresh. She was far from worried, even forgetful of Betty as he came into the hotel. There was a large mirror in the passage, the light was on the mirror and she saw herself going along the passage coming nearer and nearer to the mirror. Her body looked perfect in it. When she entered her room she let down her bathing suit. She began to walk up and down and suddenly the thought struck her that it would be fun if McKenna burst into the room. But he was not the man to burst into any room.

"I had a lovely swim," she said when they sat down to breakfast.

"It's a nice change," he said, "after all that dust on the farm."

She watched every movement of his during breakfast. He was not bad looking. He had a fine nose and good teeth, but she wished he had not a moustache. He had nice hands. No, he was not hideous.

"I am still thinking about that farm of yours," he said. "The best thing would be to let Eric run it for you."

"I want to sell it."

"But I've explained to you that the money you would get for the farm wouldn't suffice to pay off the debts."

"I never understood financial matters."

He smiled. "I gathered that. But believe me the best way out would be to pay off the debts and let Eric run it for you. I'll foot the bill."

Gloria shook her head. "David, you've spent far too much on me. Now that I'm your wife I don't need the farm."

Though she seemed to be looking at the palms, she was watching him from the corner of her eye.

"But think of your son. It might be an excellent start in life for him to have that farm."

"Don't be silly, he's only seven months old."

"He'll grow up. We're all supposed to grow up."

She thought that he was joking and she laughed. She was out to please but he remained serious, so she stopped laughing.

Later she said, "I'll leave it to you."

"Good, I'll write to Eric."

He left her and she took the dachshund for a walk. She saw Captain Robinson talking to an Indian.

(IV)

Captain Robinson thought he would go to bed. It was ten p.m. and he was tired. He dragged himself to his bedroom but when he put on the light the idea of sleeping appeared so nauseating to him that he hurried back to the bar, McKenna was there.

"You will have a drink with me, Major," the captain said.

He said that monotonously because in the long run it did not matter whether he owed one whisky more or less. He was acquiring a detached mind. Other people would say to themselves a drink, and think of the money buying that drink involved, but he was above that. The price meant damn all.

"Thank you," said McKenna.

"Here's how," the captain said. "It's nice to have a real sahib in the place," he added. He looked up and there was the missionary in the doorway. He was annoyed. It was no business of a mealy-mouthed missionary to come to the bar; and he would surely upset his plans. The captain's plans were simple and straightforward: McKenna must give him some money. Even ten quid would do. It

is a nice feeling to have ten quid in one's pocket, especially if the day to vanish might come to-morrow, or maybe the following day. The missionary smiled and came slowly forward.

"I hope," he said, "that I'm not disturbing you, gentlemen."

"Of course not," said McKenna because Captain Robinson winked at him.

"I thought," the missionary said, "that it wouldn't be a bad idea to have a drink. Breaking the daily routine, ha, ha. There was a time," he went on reminiscently, "when I used to be very fond of beer. Have you any beer, captain?"

"No," the captain said rudely, "I only serve spirits in the bar."

"Then perhaps I could have a whisky and soda." He was determined to have a drink.

"Are you celebrating your departure?" the captain asked.

"No, we're still undecided," the missionary said. He lifted his glass, stared at it earnestly, then took a sip and then swallowed the contents of the glass. He shook himself. "Do you think I could have another drink?" he asked.

"You can have a gallon as long as you have the money," the captain said.

"I think a gallon would be very expensive," teeheed the missionary. He meant that as a minor joke.

The captain yawned. He was tired and there was no getting away from it that he wanted sleep. He shouted for the steward. "Good night, Major," he said and went out ignoring the missionary.

"He looks an unhappy man," the missionary said.

"I didn't notice it," McKenna said.

"It's only a guess, but I always maintain that we all have hidden sorrows. Some of us conceal them well: others are less skilful."

"Will you have a drink with me?" McKenna asked.

The missionary was profuse with his thanks.

He lifted his newly filled glass and looked through it and he smiled at the jaundiced world on the other side of the glass.

"Though," he said, "I make it a rule never to pry into other people's lives, I couldn't help realizing that you, sir, are here on your honeymoon. So I drink to your happiness and to the happiness of your esteemed wife, too."

"Thank you: that's very kind of you."

The missionary became loquacious in an apologetic manner.

"Marriage is a great blessing. It is easier for two to bear the burden of life. I shouldn't use the word burden, but I'm sure you understand what I wish to convey."

McKenna said that he understood him perfectly well. "One always

hopes," the missionary went on, "that the other partner in the marriage is luckier than one is. A fallacy, but the Lord will forgive one for it." He stared at the glass, fingered it, then turned it round. That made him smile. He hit his neck and in his soft palm a mosquito found its death. He looked at the mosquito and then he dropped it; and then he went on to speak of marriage and the manifold blessings of married life. The heat was simply unbearable. "I think," said the missionary with a sigh, "it is time for bed." He wished McKenna good night and went out.

Soon McKenna followed. He undressed hurriedly and went to bed. The heat was like a cumbersome heavy stone on him. He heard Gloria tossing about on her bed. She could not sleep. Nor could he. She had white breasts: but self-control is a finer thing. He put on the light and once more read the letter he had received from his brother Alastair the day before he got married. He had put the letter into his wallet, thus it had travelled with him.

"So you are getting married again," his brother wrote, "I hope you'll have a son and a lot of fun. But what are you going to do with your tree? I don't think you'll be able to take it into holy matrimony." On the third page he said, "The doctor's sister has asked after you. I told her you were getting married. She seemed pleased and asked me to tell you that she hopes you'll be happy." He ended up by saying, "I'm as poorly as ever. I should be in a boarding house in Menton. Perhaps I would be if I weren't rich, and perhaps I'd be much happier."

Gloria was moving about next door. She must be near the window. He listened. There was utter silence framed in the whine-like chorus of the mosquitoes. He heard her move and return to bed. He took his handkerchief from under the pillow and wiped his face and chin. A mosquito had got under the net. He killed the mosquito and there was now a patch of blood on the net. He put his hand out carefully and turned out the light. Another mosquito had got in, but he could not be bothered. He fell asleep towards dawn. Gloria was still restless.

Next day the heat remained unchanged. The colour of the sea was of pale blue ink, and he stayed in the water for nearly an hour, wetting his head every few minutes, for it was the season of sunstrokes. Gloria was silent most of the day.

"I want to ask you a very frank question," he said in the afternoon. She looked frightened. "Do you like being here?"

"Of course I do. Why do you ask me that?"

"Because I hate this place. It's . . . it's . . ." he searched for the word, ". . . hot decay. It's like an immense mosquito trying to suck your blood. To put it plainly: do you like being here?"

"No, I don't. I hate that man Robinson and the missionary and that awful ugly wife of his."

"Then why don't we go back?"

"Back to the farm?"

"Why not?"

"Won't it seem queer," she asked thinking of Betty, "that we come back so soon?"

"I wouldn't bother about that."

"But, please, let's spend a couple of days in Nairobi." That she felt would placate the Manes of Betty's wrath.

"An excellent idea," he said, "Let's leave to-morrow."

"Good," she said and patted his hand. "It will be wonderful to be out of here."

In the evening he went to the bar. Captain Robinson was comparatively drunk. "Have a drink, Major," he said.

"Have it with me."

Captain Robinson did not care one way or the other and accepted the drink. The missionary came in a few minutes later.

"I think," he said, "I'll have a whisky."

"I'll get the steward to serve you," the captain said. He shouted for the steward, and the steward came and the captain took half a bottle of whisky and said, "Good night, Major. I should like to have a chat with you some time."

"You'll have to hurry because I'm leaving to-morrow."

"What? Leaving to-morrow?"

"I'm afraid so."

Captain Robinson tapped his half bottle against the counter. It made much noise. "But I thought you were going to stay at least a week."

"My wife changed her mind."

The captain tapped the bottle louder and as he listened to the noise he reached the conclusion that he was only dealing with a ten quid case. Time was against a larger sum. Nevertheless he must have the ten quid.

"I'm so sorry," he said. "Anyway I'll be seeing you in the morning." He took himself and the half bottle out of the bar.

"The poor man must be very unhappy," said the missionary. "So you're leaving us, sir?"

"It's too hot here. Far too hot."

The missionary smiled indulgently. "We lived for five years near the coast in Tanganyika. It was hotter there. Still, you're wise to go if you don't like this damp heat. It's admirable to make up one's

mind so quickly. I've been here over a fortnight and don't know what to do. Will you have a drink with me?"

"I was going to bed."

"I should be much obliged if you would have a drink with me."

He spoke so earnestly, entreatingly, that McKenna had not the heart to say no.

"I'm in a difficult position," said the missionary. "I've prayed a lot for guidance but the Lord appears to withhold it from me." There was no answer to that and he did not expect one. "Does it strike you as unseemly to find a missionary drinking whisky in a bar?" he asked suddenly.

"It hadn't occurred to me."

"You're a kindly person. Last night I tried it as an experience. It made me sleep well. I have many sleepless nights. I used to be a first-rate sleeper." His little eyes narrowed as he peered at the memory of those serene, undisturbed nights. "I suppose in those days I had a clear conscience."

"Coming into the bar doesn't give you a bad conscience, I hope."

"No, it isn't that at all." He teeheed and McKenna ordered drinks. "Do you think," the missionary asked, "that it would bore you if I put my case to you?"

"Of course not."

"You're a kind man. I said to my wife the first time we saw you that you must be a kind person." He sighed. "It is a sad case. Sad for me but especially for my wife. We had a little daughter and the Lord took her unto Him." He drank some whisky. "I was a missionary in Tanganyika. I know that many of you people don't like us missionaries, but you of all people will believe me when I say that the life of a missionary isn't an easy one, especially with some of the tribes." He fingered his glass. "We go to them to bring them faith and happiness through faith but many of them are stubborn and don't want either of them. To offer happiness and to be turned down."

He raised his glass, took a sip and with his left hand wiped the perspiration off his forehead. Quite a few beads of perspiration escaped his hand and they glistened in the lamp light. "But I don't want to speak to you about my professional life." He laughed: apparently he had said something funny. "My wife and I were happy: very happy. We had our little daughter. Daphne was her name, I think that's a very pretty name. She was born three years ago. Here is her picture." He rummaged in his wallet and took out a snapshot. It was dirty and crumpled. "Our little Daphne."

Politely McKenna bent forward and looked at the snapshot.

Little Daphne had a comely, undistinguished face and masses of dark hair. "She died six weeks ago." Her commonplace features now had a new significance. Remote and lofty.

"My wife," said the missionary, putting the snapshot back into his wallet, "has lost her faith. That is a great blow to me."

The steward went and sat down in the corner but remembered that he would be ticked off if Captain Robinson found him resting, so he stood up and leaned against the wall.

"I don't know what to do," the missionary said simply.

"I'm very sorry for you."

"My wife persuaded me to leave Tanganyika. I was weak. She said she couldn't stick the country any more, she said she'd rather die than stay on. I came here to Kenya but my superiors won't hear of my working here. We are like soldiers in a sense. I have deserted my post." He smiled apologetically. "You are a stranger, sir, and probably we shall never meet again. But I know you have understanding. I feel it. Tell me what am I to do? They tell me to return to Tanganyika. I'm a missionary and it's the only kind of life I know. My wife refuses to return." He took a step back in order to wait more decorously for an answer. As the answer was not immediately forthcoming, he added, "It is terrible to lose an only child."

"It must be indeed. But I don't think I'm the right person to give you advice. I was a soldier. I loved the army, yet I resigned my commission to hurt my pride even more. If I told you that no sorrow lasts for ever and you will feel differently about it in a year's time and therefore you should return to your post; then I'd be giving you sensible advice but it would be hypocritical of me to tell you so. I've thrown away my vocation for much less."

"Yet you seem such a strong, resolute man."

"There you are."

The missionary called for drinks. "Now I know," he said, "that I'll be in good company if I desert my vocation." He swallowed his drink and put the glass on the counter with a bang, "My father-in-law," he said, "has a laundry in Nottingham. I'm certain that if I ask him he'll give me a job in the laundry." He seemed delighted at the prospect of washing shirts instead of cleansing souls. "Thank you," he said extending a moist hand. "You have been of great help to me, sir. I'm going right now to tell my wife that we're leaving Africa. It will cheer her no end." He turned back from the door. "Thank you from the bottom of my heart," he said.

McKenna waited till he heard him close his door, then he went to his room. He got hurriedly into bed as though wanting to escape

from the heat. There was complete silence next door. But he was not thinking of Gloria. What a joke, he said half aloud, to have advised that little man to run after his sorrow. Still, it was not his fault that the missionary had considered him such a shining example. True, but he should have explained to him that he would be happier as an unhappy missionary than as a wretched laundry manager longing for the past.

"Are you asleep?" Gloria's voice asked on the other side of the door.

"No, it's very hot."

"Yes." There came a pause and then she said, "I'm going to try and sleep. Thank God we're leaving to-morrow. Good night."

She moved away from the door and as an afterthought added, "David."

He heard her getting into bed, then she was quiet and then he thought she was getting up but she had only turned on the other side. He got out of bed, sat down at the table and wrote a long letter to the missionary. When he had finished he went out and left the letter on the desk in the lounge.

(V)

Gloria appeared preoccupied in the morning. She talked little at breakfast. They breakfasted comparatively late and there was nobody else on the verandah. The sea was flat and the palms were listless. There were no clouds which made the heat perhaps more noticeable. They were going to leave around eleven and Gloria went to her room to pack. He watched her as she walked away. She was wearing shorts and her long straight legs were a fresh contrast to the silent heat. He drank another cup of coffee and went to the lounge. He glanced at the table: the letter was no longer there. The missionary's wife was near the entrance.

"Good morning," he said. "Is your husband about? I'd have liked to say good-bye to him."

She stared hard at him and turned her back on him and walked away. She disappeared down the passage and in a short while he heard her door bang. She was, he thought, the sort of woman who would bang doors. He found Captain Robinson in his office.

"I've come to pay the bill," he said.

"Here it is, Major. I'm very sorry to lose you."

He waited till McKenna had written out the cheque. "Major," he said leaning forward, "I'm going to speak to you very frankly. I'm in a terrible mess. I'm not going to say to you the usual things

one says under such circumstances. . . ." He smiled an engaging horsey smile, ". . . but I want to ask you as a brother officer. . . ."

"Will ten pounds do ? That's all I can let you have."

"Ten pounds won't help me. Twenty pounds would get me out of the awful mess I'm in. Please, Major, let me explain."

McKenna raised his hand and the captain became silent. Glaring sulkily at the cheque book he watched McKenna write out a cheque for ten pounds. "I hope this will help you," McKenna said. "Good-bye."

The hired car came at eleven. As they drove away from the hotel Gloria said, "I hope you haven't given him money."

"Given whom money ?"

"That awful man Robinson."

"I've given him ten pounds."

"But you shouldn't have given it to him. Why did you ?"

"Because I can afford it and because, I suppose, I'm too much of a coward to say no." In fact, he thought, he was like Miles, only the other way round.

"I'd rather have given it to the missionary," Gloria said.

"I've given him good advice," McKenna said. "Then I gave him different sort of advice. You're quite right. The ten pounds would have been more useful to him." He began to laugh and his laugh frightened her and she drew away from him. Later she thought of Betty and without looking at him patted his hand. "It's so like me," he said ; but the breeze carried his words towards the sea and she did not hear him.

The next morning they arrived in Nairobi and Gloria had a headache and went early to bed that night. Their rooms did not adjoin at the club: there was a courtyard between them. The night was cool and as he turned out the light he sighed a long contented sigh, for he would sleep well. He fell asleep and suddenly he woke up. Gloria was standing beside the bed.

"I want to get in beside you," she said in an intense theatrical whisper. She got in beside him and pressed his face against her breast. "David, I want to be a good wife to you."

She smiled at the night and the smile was meant for Betty. Betty could never be angry with her again.

PART FIVE

(I)

THE AUTUMN RAINS DID NOT COME. THERE WERE just a few showers and the grass turned green but soon it was yellow and there was frost at night and the tips of the grass were hard in the mornings, and the sun ruled unchallenged and the yellow grass withered to death; though it was comparatively slow in dying. The river was low. The red dust rose now and then spiralwise and Nanny said that she had to dust the pram at least three times a day.

She was a formidable woman. She had had some spine trouble and walked a little bent and on account of her long hooked nose you would have thought that she was on her way to turn a beautiful princess into a nasty toad. But she was efficient, deadly efficient, and Gloria liked her.

"I can't stand the woman," McKenna often said.

"But she's so good with the baby," said Gloria.

That was true. She would sit beside the pram cooing away and making curious loving signs with her hands. The baby was growing fast. You could already discern the features that would remain with it even in manhood. Little Davy resembled Gloria in looks and she was sorry about that. He should have looked like Miles. He sat up for an hour every morning. McKenna thought he seemed very uncomfortable and asked Nanny why he had to sit up with a pillow behind his back.

"It strengthens the spine," Nanny said stooping more than ever.

She was a Theosophist and therefore would not eat meat. One day she found meat in her soup. She ran to Gloria and complained bitterly. "It'll take me seven years to cleanse myself of that meat," she said. Gloria sympathised and told McKenna that she was a grand character.

Not only did Davy sit up but he was beginning to utter sounds.

The nursery was next door to the office and while working in his office McKenna could not but listen to those tentative tiny noises.

"Shouldn't we have the nursery elsewhere?" Gloria asked when piercing screams began to be added to Davy's vocabulary.

"Why?" McKenna asked.

"Because of the noise the baby makes. It must disturb you."

"It doesn't disturb me at all. As a matter of fact I rather like it."

She shook her head as it befits a good wife. For Gloria was a

good wife and Betty praised her for it and she could look Betty in the eye without remorse or qualms. Whenever it occurred to her that she was slacking she went to McKenna's room that night. He should have no cause to complain; and since she was young and desirable and had a fine muscular body, there was no cause for complaint. One night he said to her, "I love you." He found it easy to say that in the night. She was gratified and was almost sorry for him because she believed it. Not that she bothered to give it much thought. Another night a laughing hyæna's cackle cut into the monotonous hooting of the other hyæna. She was terrified. "He'll take me away," she said hysterically. "That's why he laughs." Her embraces left nothing to desire while the dogs barked and the hyæna shrieked with devilish laughter. Next morning it was her turn to laugh. "I was just showing off," she said.

The basset hound was getting obese. He preferred to lie in the shady dust but McKenna soon discovered his favourite hiding places and there was nothing else to do for the basset hound but to accompany his master on his walks. On a hot afternoon as the basset hound panted up the ridge at the back of the farm Gloria said, "They're fine trees those umbrella thorns."

"Yes, they're fine trees," McKenna said. He had not been near them since his marriage. Life was flowing smoothly in its new channel and he did not want obstacles, not even in the shape of the umbrella thorns.

"Look at that silly dog," Gloria said.

The basset hound had gone and sat down under the tree in the middle. "Come out of there," McKenna called. The basset hound waited a little, then rose and came after them.

"Why should he want to go and sit under that tree?" Gloria asked.

"Probably he wanted shade."

But Gloria liked to pursue questions, especially if they were of no importance. "It's funny though," she said, "Why should he choose that tree? He sat down as if the tree belonged to him."

"Perhaps it does."

"But David he surely must have a reason for sitting down under that tree." She could have gone on like that for hours.

"As a matter of fact," he said, "there was a time when I used to come up here in the afternoons and sit under that tree."

"Like a fakir contemplating his navel? Or is it a yogi?"

"I think it's a yogi."

"You ought to know. You've been such a long time in India. Madras Sappers and Miners. Sounds frightfully distinguished."

They reached an empty river bed. The umbrella thorns were

no longer visible. "Look," she said suddenly. On the other side where the cedar forest began with a few lonely cedars as the rear guards of the dense forest, there was a herd of buffalo. The buffaloes had heard them and were beginning to melt into the forest. Within a few seconds only the silent ominous trees remained; but the buffaloes had gone so quickly and noiselessly, that it would not have been surprising if the trees had followed suit.

"Buffaloes," Gloria said.

"One should really carry a rifle round here."

"I wasn't frightened. I'd never be frightened with you, David."

"That's sweet of you."

They turned back. The sun was beating down hard. They did not pass the umbrella thorns on their way back. "You do like me?" she asked.

"You know I do."

"I want to be a good wife to you. You deserve it."

"You are a very good wife."

The outlines of the swamp appeared. The long yellow stretch of papyrus reeds looked at that distance like a gigantic wheat field and the wheat ready to be cut.

"There is one thing I want to ask from you," Gloria said.

He hoped she would not start asking him about his first wife. At almost punctual intervals it was her habit to question him on her account. "Ask anything you want to ask," he said.

If she started talking of Margery he would tell her that he had practically nothing to relate about her. It was not a matter of reticence: it was, so it seemed to him, a lost habit he could not recapture; and Gloria was the last person who could help him to do so.

"Is there anything you don't like about me?" Gloria asked. "Please be frank."

She was walking a little ahead of him. He took a long step and caught up with her. "Why do you ask that?"

"Because I want you to be completely satisfied with me."

"My dear, I have no complaints."

The house came into view. A white bent figure was moving across the compound. "None whatever?"

"Do you want me to be frank?" he asked.

"Yes, please. There is Nanny."

He was not interested in Nanny. "I don't want to annoy you," he said, "but it seems to me you don't take enough interest in Davy."

She stopped abruptly, so he had to stop too. "I don't know what you mean," she said. "What more could I do? Carry him on my back like a native bibi?"

"You know I don't mean that."

"I think you're unjust. We have Nanny and the best thing is not to interfere with her." She walked on. "There isn't much one can do for a child of his age. He's too young for anything else than having his nappies changed."

"I wasn't thinking of his nappies. You're wrong about him being too young. I for one am surprised because he's so old for his age."

"You aren't serious."

"I am serious. Considering that he might live for seventy years it is simply amazing how much he knows after being alive only eight months."

She said nothing. She was moving fast and he had to take long strides to keep up with her. "I hope," he said, "I've expressed myself not too unintelligently."

"You're just an old romantic, David. But if it makes you happy, I'll take him on my knee when we get back and sing to him your favourite song. Have you a favourite song?"

She laughed because she was full of spirits; but as they approached the house she asked suspiciously, "It wasn't Betty who put the idea into your head?"

"What idea?"

"About the baby. Like all barren women she fusses too much about other people's children." There was not much charity in her voice.

"I've never discussed you with Betty."

"You're a grand person, David. I mean it."

She left him in the compound. He went into the sitting-room and Ali appeared with the tea things. Gloria came in soon after him. "Here he is," she said.

Davy smiled at McKenna and put out his hand. Gloria deposited him on the settee and put a cushion behind him, then pushed an arm-chair against the settee so that he should not fall off.

She poured out the tea and went and sat beside her child and played with it. Davy was lying flat on her knees. He laughed with delight and as in that flat position his face was almost invisible, the laughter seemed to come from nowhere.

"Now you go and sit on your godfather's knees," she said.

She lifted Davy and gave him to McKenna: she had given him a cup of tea in the same way ten minutes before.

McKenna took him and made him sit on his lap. He was embarrassed. The proximity of the child was almost painful. It was like meeting your own thoughts wearing a top hat and carrying an umbrella. Davy was happy and started to laugh. Gloria went out

of the room and they were alone. Davy got bored with laughing and blew a raspberry. He blew it noisily, scientifically: nevertheless a lot of saliva dribbled on to his frock. He repeated the raspberry and waited expectantly. So McKenna blew him a raspberry. He blew it furtively and blushed. Davy was delighted and he blew another and then another. Now he was surer of himself and a new raspberry was to follow. It was wonderful to watch that completely happy face and to know that it was inspired by no ulterior motive. He pursed his mouth in order to make the next raspberry a memorable one. The setting sun was sending in his harsh polished rays. A shadow of a somewhat crooked shape cut into the rays. It was Nanny.

"I've come for 'oo," she crooned and extended her arms.

"Must he go?" McKenna asked.

"It's time for him to have his bath," said Nanny and whisked the child off his knees. Muttering endearing words she carried Davy off.

(II)

McKenna discovered after a time that Nanny had the habit of retiring around three in the afternoon to her room with Theosophist journals and pamphlets for a little reading, thinking and a nap. The baby was always left on the nursery verandah. During those daily rests he began to visit the baby on the verandah. Davy would lie flat, for it was not the hour for him to be propped up to strengthen his spine. There was a brisk exchange of raspberries at the beginning and Davy began to expect the visits punctually. And he then came every day. He used to make him sit up. The wonder of touching the child was wearing off. The child would sit looking at him and he sat on the balustrade of the verandah and they were both silent after the first few minutes of raspberries. Often Davy fell asleep.

Two doors opened on to the verandah. One led to Nanny's room, the other to the day nursery. McKenna's eyes would watch the door behind which Nanny rested. She would not catch him unaware. And as his eyes watched that door one afternoon, about two months after the last shower had left the earth to the devastation of the sun, he thought that it was a curious thing that he was daily expecting to hear that his brother was dead. He knew that it would neither hurt him nor shock him and he would view Alastair's death detachedly and without the tears such an occasion usually asked for. Yet during that month or so he had spent with his brother he had been happy with him. But you cannot bridge the gulf of many years though at times you succeed in throwing a plank across. And that

friendship in Hertfordshire could not eradicate the many misunderstandings and quarrels that had existed long before it. Alastair used to imagine that he had been a slick little boy and that was why their grandmother had left him her money. He was convinced that his brother David knew a lot of tricks. Tricks? All his dealings with his grandmother had been forced on him and prompted by fear. Fear. He looked at the baby.

Did Davy already know what fear, abysmal hopeless fear, meant? You can never be so afraid in later years; for you have already had experience that dulls your instincts, and you know that in the long run there is always a way out. But the fright and fear of a child is in a cul de sac. There is no open door at the end of it. In fact there is no door at all. Davy seemed slightly ferocious in his sleep. He was having no nonsense from dreams. McKenna tiptoed up to him. The pool of beginning must be full of frightening shapes. There is no knowledge, no logic and not even cynicism to control the nightmare of fear. Gigantic shapes of unbelievable evilness and nothing to stop them and nothing to guide them. They writhe like snakes and glory in their awfulness.

Davy opened his eyes and closed them and slept on. Perhaps, said McKenna to himself, there were ways and means whereby one could save others through one's own experience. He wished that he could put his own fear of yore into a small glass tube and inoculate Davy with it. The basset hound suddenly growled in his sleep and McKenna went back to the balustrade. Margery, his first wife, had been a Yorkshirewoman. They had returned to England two years after their marriage and because she wanted to see her relations they went up to Yorkshire. Her relations were heavy people, dull, and proud of their dull ignorance. They ate and drank copiously and enjoyed life to the full. Alastair was in Edinburgh and he came down to Yorkshire to see his brother. He and Margery got on well together. In those days Alastair was an excitable person but at the same time he had dark Highland charm. He used to wear a kilt and women were quite mad about him. He had evolved a theory that if Scotland ever separated from England he would be crowned King of Scotland. He was popular with Margery's relations and Margery grew fond of him and Alastair would often say in front of her, "How lucky you are, David. You're the luckiest man in the world."

There was an evening when Margery, Alastair and he were walking about in York. They did not notice it then but now in retrospect it became apparent that during their walk they had been going round and round the Minster. Dusk was approaching and the Minster was pale, though not fragile. It stood hard and beautiful and

provincial and you knew it would go on like that till unlimited eternity. But perhaps the Minster and the Treasurer's House were only tricks of memory. They walked and Alastair talked and laughed at his own remarks and threw spirited admiring glances at Margery. There was nothing that should have annoyed a husband in those glances. They simply conveyed the admiration a pretty woman, a fine setter and the contemporary copy of an old master deserves. Then they went down to the Ouse, crossed the bridge and saw Alastair off at the station.

"I wish, David," Margery remarked after the train had pulled out, "that you were like your brother." Not much of a memory that was.

And sitting there on the balustrade with dog and child sleeping, he wondered what Alastair would have done if he had been in his shoes two years later. Curiously enough he was not annoyed or angry when he thought of Randall or when unasked Randall's long face popped out of the gloom of kept down memories. You do not steal your fellow officer's wife, which meant that he, McKenna, would not have done a thing like that. But Randall was not he, so he had no earthly reason to be angry with him. "My father," said Randall, and it was difficult to visualise that big self-satisfied man with a father, "said he would cut me off with a penny if I ever were a co-respondent. And then I might just as well give up my military career."

For there was another dividing line between McKenna and Randall. McKenna loved the army because it was his vocation, his whole world. Randall was passionately attached to it because he wanted to be a general one day. Red tabs had a mystical drawing power for him. They were his Jerusalem. He could not be happy before he reached it. But on the road he needed the eight hundred a year his father gave him. So his argument was straight and clear cut. "I beg you as one soldier to another to let Margery divorce you."

He said that in a sincere manly voice. His voice was already training to become the general's voice. McKenna let Margery divorce him. He left the army though there was no need for him to do so. No father to stop his allowance. Margery and Randall got married, Randall's father died and Randall resigned his commission because he had to take over the family business. It was a prosperous firm manufacturing agricultural implements.

But no, he said to himself watching Davy, he was not thinking either of Margery or Randall. He was just asking himself the question: what would Alastair have done in his place? There was no answer to that. Alastair had not been in his place; and Alastair would probably have said that no woman would have got him into that corner. Now that Alastair was ill and on the verge of death he

would not say that. Poor Alastair. Anyway it was well after four and Nanny would come to feed Davy. Perhaps if Davy could escape fear he might also escape an unhappy marriage. He got off the balustrade, the child slept on and as he came round the nursery he saw the syce waiting with the pony for Gloria. He met her in the doorway.

"Do you mind if I ride over to Betty?" she asked.

She was the good wife and liked to ask his permission after she had decided to do a certain thing. Though the syce had been ordered to bring round the pony and she had put on her riding boots, none the less she didn't forget to ask him. And she knew she was right; for conventions of the type you use in Bridge oil the wheels of cohabitation.

"Of course," said McKenna in the voice he would have used if he had answered with Two No Trumps. "Have a good time." But Gloria was not yet satisfied. It was in her nature to go invariably for a Slam.

"Why don't you go over to Adams? You haven't seen him for such a long time. I don't want your old friends to say that I'm keeping you from seeing them."

She loathed Adams. He belonged to the category of bats and laughing hyænas. However, she kept that to herself.

"I'll drive over to him," McKenna said. "It's sweet of you to think of my friends." He accompanied her to the pony. A gust of wind lifted the dust and when it settled down the dust seemed redder.

"Will it never rain?" Gloria asked.

"Never," he said with a smile. He waited there for a few minutes and went off to the garage.

(III)

Up there it was a little fresher. The slopes of the Aberdares had withstood more successfully the continuous onslaught of the sun. What with the rains having let them down and the pest of locusts two years ago, McKenna thought that if the rains continued to keep away he would have to find grazing elsewhere before his cattle perished. The mortality among calves was growing. That was the first sign. The natives were becoming lethargic. The Kikuyu is not much of a fighter. (The Masai knew that and used to take advantage of it.) He would talk to Adams. He had little cattle and plenty of land. But Adam's land was in quarantine. He had better speak to the D.C. He would have to move before other people started to move up the slopes of the Aberdares or no grass would be left for his cattle.

He had lived through a drought seven years ago. To watch your cattle starving to death and nothing you could do about it. The sky heavy with vultures: happy and well fed vultures. There was an image that was still with him. A cow, almost a skeleton, standing under a tree too sick to move. Two vultures sat on the tree. They were waiting. The sun was on their bald heads and they were like a couple of successful elderly business men who had cornered the market, in fact were still cornering it. That was one picture of Africa. But there was another. Full moon and a Marabu stork sitting on the branch of a tree. The moon was just under the Marabu stork's beak. It was like a wonderful elegant gouache with neither the stork nor the moon being real. That was the other side of Africa. Between the two was the road upon which he travelled. That road, he guessed, would have been the same whether he lived in Africa or not.

Laborde's battered box body car stood outside Adams's house. Half of the thatched roof of the house was still hanging. The widow's veil the widow wished to discard but could not be bothered.

As McKenna opened the door Laborde came hurrying towards him. "Nice of you to come, my dear fellow," he said. "Haven't seen you for nearly a fortnight."

"You shouldn't be so lazy. You ought to come to us more often."

They smiled affectionately and Laborde said, "I'll come round on Sunday."

"Please," said McKenna and they went in.

A log was lying across the grate and was smoking and the smoke rose towards Adams and nearly enveloped him. He was as thin as ever but to-night he seemed to be in a good mood. His black untidy Charlie Chaplin moustache was all that was visible in the smoke.

"I'm going to choke," Laborde said. "Have been choking for the last hour."

"Incense rising towards the Godhead," said Adams laughing.

"Who's the Godhead?" McKenna asked.

"Neither me nor Laborde," Adams said and laughed a quick harsh laugh. "So you've taken off your slippers to come and see an old friend. Sit down and have a drink."

"You're no longer on the waggon?"

"I never was on the waggon. That was only an experience."

"Rather a drab experience," Laborde said.

"Experiences are neither drab nor colourful: they're just bloody experiences."

"Playing about with words," Laborde said and gave McKenna a large smile. It was like old times.

"But I only have beer," Adams said.

"Is beer an experience?"

"No, it's beer."

Yes, it was like old times and they laughed and as the log was not smoking any more, McKenna pulled up a chair to the fire.

"We're going to have a bad drought," he said.

"Droughts shouldn't worry a family man," Adams said. "It's only us desiccated bachelors who are going to feel it."

"You have practically no cattle," McKenna said, "so you needn't worry."

"The advantage of not being a capitalist," Laborde said.

Adams poured out more beer and went and brought a book into the light of the hurricane lamp. "This is an excellent book," he said. "It debunks Oliver Cromwell. Simply tears his skin off."

"And why should anybody's skin be torn off?" McKenna asked.

"Because Laborde is fat," said Adams and shrieked with laughter. "Nice to see you, McKenna, again." And he patted McKenna's knee. A letter fell out of the book. Adams picked it up and looked at it. "It's from that awful nephew of mine. I think I've mentioned him to you. He writes he's coming out in a month or two. I won't have him near the place."

"Do you dislike him?" Laborde asked.

"I don't know him. But there is something about him that makes me dislike him. Not on sight but without even having seen him." He shook himself. "I won't have him here. You must read this book, McKenna. I'll lend it to you but first I must read it again." Then they talked about the drought but Adams was not interested.

"One should get above such matters," he said.

"No, one must stick to them and get the better of them," McKenna said.

Adams stood up and went and planted himself in front of McKenna.

"Drought and pestilence and pain and sickness are here to-day and gone to-morrow," he said. "They don't matter. They might play a small part in the development of the world but I doubt that. I don't think droughts make any man better and having bubonic plague doesn't improve your moral development. I broke my arm when I was about ten years old. My father said to me: 'I'm sure you're going to profit by the experience,' I laughed at him. Experience doesn't come from the outside. It comes from within."

"Experience again," Laborde said.

"But," said McKenna, "experience often changes you within. You are a different and probably a better man after a large dose of suffering."

"I disagree with you. Did experience teach Napoleon?"

"Perhaps you're right but it sounds rather disconcerting."

"Experience-is nothing," said Adams. "You are what you are and all an experience can do for you is to open your eyes provided you have eyes to see with."

"What about suicide?" asked Laborde. Throughout his adult life he had been afraid of suicide. It might get hold of him and kill him off before his balanced self would have time to step in. To be murdered by oneself was a thought that made him shudder. "Isn't it true that many people commit suicide on account of an experience?"

"You're talking again through your hat," Adams said. "You commit suicide either because you have reached the peak and have nothing finer to look forward to, or because of a complete moral collapse."

"That is an overstatement if I ever heard one," McKenna said smiling.

Adams was hurt and McKenna realized that and the conversation abruptly sagged. He did his best to encourage Adams to further argument but it had no result. "I think," he said, "I must be going. It was very nice to see you. May I come again soon?"

"Come to-morrow if you want to," said Adams and light came back to his eyes.

As usual it was Laborde who saw McKenna off. "Fundamentally," said Laborde, "he talks a lot of nonsense."

"Perhaps we are talking nonsense. One never knows. Be that as it may I must find grazing for my cattle. I was badly caught last time. I don't want to be caught a second time."

Laborde shook his head in the dark as if to intimate that indeed one should not be caught a second time, though fundamentally he was not interested in droughts either. "Everything going well?" he asked.

"Everything."

"I'm glad. I'll come and see you on Sunday."

PART SIX

(I)

THE STATION BUILDING OF KAMPI YA MARWA WAS low and small. A shed was attached to it and there was another shed fifty yards away. It was around eleven in the morning and the sun beat down in burning vertical lines. An Indian family sat on the bench outside the station. There was symmetry about that family. Father, mother, son and daughter. The mother sat like a statue, the children were impatient though not as impatient as the father. Father's knees moved nervously and a couple of fingers were picking deep in his nose. The crescendo of his knees was in rhythm with the crescendo of his fingers. Suddenly he boxed his son's ears. That was done with the free hand. The son shrieked without much conviction and mother never budged and the knees went on vibrating and the fingers continued to attend to the nostrils.

Further up, near the second shed, stood two trucks. There was plenty of commotion near the trucks. McKenna was loading cattle, to be precise he was loading thirty-two bullocks. They were going to Nairobi. Soon they would be slaughtered and then eaten but the bullocks did not appear to mind. They minded though about the forthcoming railway journey and hated the idea of being pushed into the dark trucks and to be unable to move and to be crowded and jerked about. Now and then McKenna gave one a prod with his stick. The heavy beast would hardly feel it, especially as there was another driven behind it and its horns were pushing it forward and shoving it into the dark inside of the truck. Thus they helped each other on their fatal journey.

Gloria stood beside him. She had come to the station because she liked stations, as stations were the symbols of a sort of individual independence to which, though she never aspired, she was romantically attached. A train might take you away or it might bring you back or even bring you for the first time; and there was not anything strictly like that in one's own life. She watched the cattle being loaded.

"I wonder if they know," she said, "that they're going to die." She did not speak loud enough for McKenna to hear her. It would have been an unnecessary effort to speak loudly, for she wanted no answer. There was something very soothing in asking such a question.

It would have been painful and frightening if one of the bullocks had turned to her and said, "Yes, we know but that won't help us."

A large brindle bullock came to a halt in front of her. She saw the left eye, so large, so limpid. In a day or two that eye would be dead. That eye would never see the sun, the sky and the moon again. "You poor thing," she said. "No more grass, you'll never chew the cud again." She could have cried. A black bullock driven from behind pushed its rump. The brindle one lurched forward and trotted into the truck. The black bullock was the last to be loaded.

"Let's go to the station," McKenna said. "I must see the station master."

They crossed the line and as they crossed it Gloria noticed a compact black spot where the lines met in the distance. "The train is coming," she said. They reached the platform.

"Adams's houseboy," said McKenna pointing at a native.

"He looks it," Gloria said.

The boy wore a dirty kansaw which was mostly in rags. He held a letter in his hand and his face was anxious. His eyes were full of the fear bearers of secret messages are often supposed to have. He was looking right and left and as the train became audible he concentrated on the train and was nearly run over by the engine. The station master appeared.

"I must wait till he's finished with the passengers," McKenna said.

The boy turned round. He recognised him by his voice. "Jambo bwana," he said. He came forward and still frightened by the engine, in a torrent of indifferent Swahili, explained that his master had sent him with a letter which was to be handed to bwana Leonard Adams. Now that the train was there he did not know how to set about finding that bwana Leonard Adams. He showed the envelope to McKenna. The mission was far above his wits.

"I'll find him for you," McKenna said.

"How ridiculous to send a boy to the station with a letter," Gloria said. "How could he find an utter stranger. Simply ludicrous." She glanced at the envelope which was none too clean, but maybe the boy's hands were not too clean either. However the train was of more interest.

There were two passenger coaches and six freight trucks which were mostly empty. Three white passengers alighted. A South African Dutchman and his wife and a stranger. Not only a stranger but somebody who had not been in the Colony long. His brand new terai, the well-pressed corduroy trousers and the blue shirt that belonged more to Eden Rock than to the Kenya Highlands readily confirmed that. His arms were as red as the banner of class struggle. It

was easy to spot him, amazingly easy. But perhaps not so easy for the house boy. Probably most white men looked alike to him. "That must be Adams's nephew," McKenna said.

Gloria saw a tall young man. Tall but soft. His was the softness that comes from good food, deep arm chairs and other pleasures of the sedentary life. He had a boyish face and a lot of fair hair and blue eyes. They were friendly eyes, they appealed to your better feelings. She felt sure he wore silk underwear.

"Are you Leonard Adams?" McKenna asked.

An endearing smile opened the well-shaped lips. The teeth were all that teeth should be. "I am Leonard Adams," he said.

He had a deep voice. McKenna explained how the letter came to him. "Very kind of you indeed," said the deep voice.

McKenna thought that he had seen him before. It was a vague thought, one of those uncanny vague thoughts that do not develop but wait for the push which might never come.

Leonard Adams opened the letter, smiled and said, "Excuse me," and read the letter. He had a high complexion and therefore it was difficult to notice that it had turned red. "Good gracious me," he said; and then he added, "Christ Almighty."

As the man was a stranger and as giving him the letter had not been McKenna's business, he did not know whether he should speak or not. "Do you know of any hotel here?" Leonard Adams asked.

"I'm afraid there isn't a hotel here."

"Just as I feared. Back o' beyond." He smiled again. That suited him better. "I'll have to take the next train back to Nairobi."

"It leaves this afternoon."

Gloria who had been listening to their conversation now stepped forward. Leonard gave her a quick, fresh smile. He seemed careful lest his smiles should grow old. He renewed them and changed them at every opportunity.

"What's the trouble?" Gloria asked.

"This letter," smiled Leonard. It was the same smile. It would do for another minute or so. The house boy approached. His mission was done but he did not see why he should not linger. "I suppose you know my uncle," Leonard said. "I'm told everybody knows everybody in Kenya."

"He's a friend of my husband," Gloria said.

"My uncle more or less tells me that I should go to hell. Anyway he refuses to have me at his place."

"That's absolutely monstrous," Gloria said. It was nice to hit Adams, so to speak, with somebody else's whip.

"I believe he's a very eccentric person," Leonard said. "Never

met him. "Still, one might be a little kinder to one's one and only nephew." A new smile came in the wake of his words. "I came quite a long way," he went on, "and I could have gone and stayed with plenty of other people. Yet I chose to come here. He ought to be kinder."

"Your uncle's behaviour is absolutely disgusting," Gloria said. She did not know why she was using the word absolutely again. It was not one of her stock expressions.

"Now what am I to do? No hotel and I simply hate the idea of another beastly train journey. I came for a complete change to Kenya. This is a complete change. A change of plans, I mean. My plans."

"We can't let you just sit here on the platform and wait for the next train," Gloria said.

Then McKenna spoke. "I'm on very good terms with your uncle. Come and lunch with us and I'll take you afterwards round to him, and I might persuade him to behave a little more sociably."

"That's a grand idea," Gloria said. And McKenna thought: where the devil did he see the man before? He had not seen him before. It was once more that irritating fancy. He dismissed it.

"That's sweet of you," Leonard said. "You're the most delightful people in the world. Kenya hospitality. I've heard such a lot about it."

He sat in the back of the car and enjoyed the scenery enormously.

"I suppose it's full of lions round here," he said.

"We get them now and then," Gloria said.

"Have you ever seen one?"

"I've shot two."

"How wonderful. Two lions. You're terribly brave." He chatted on like that till they reached the farm. "Do lions come near the house?" he asked as the car crossed the bridge.

"I shot one about five hundred yards from the house at the beginning of the year," McKenna said.

"So you've shot lions too." He took in the view and went on to say that he would surely be frightened out of his wits if he saw a lion.

"I'm sure you wouldn't be," Gloria said. She was invariably nice to strangers. Their troubles were new troubles and without consequence. So they were no troubles at all.

"Here we are," she said.

"Charming," said Leonard. She took him into the sitting-room.

"What a fat dog," he said pointing at the basset hound who, with a preoccupied air, was going out to welcome his master back home.

"He's my husband's dog. I've got a dachshund. Here he is."

"The cleverest dogs in the world," Leonard said. He examined a table. "I think that's a real Sheraton. In fact I'm sure it's a Sheraton." He caressed the table. "I wouldn't have believed that one could find a Sheraton here in the jungle. I'm, you know, an interior decorator."

"How exciting," Gloria said. Talking to him was like talking to her own past. Though he did not use the words that had been fashionable in her London days, the fundamental values were the same. "Look at those prints," she said pointing at her Japanese prints which she had brought along when Eric took over the management of her farm. The table belonged to McKenna; and she wanted him to be interested in the prints, for they were her property.

"They're rotten," Leonard said hardly glancing at them. "Three bob each in Paddington Street. I hope you don't mind my being so frank. But it's my job to be frank." Two distinct smiles accompanied his words. "But I want to forget my job. I nearly sold you a set of French prints." He laughed. "I came out here for a change, a real rough change. My uncle's letter was rough enough but that Sheraton table has made up for it. But the table isn't a change. Uncle's letter is a change." He laughed again. It was a completely sincere supercilious laugh.

"Have a drink."

"I'd love a drink."

McKenna came in. "I was admiring that table, sir," Leonard said.

"I'm glad you like it."

Leonard felt he would not get much change out of his host. He would not waste his time on him. He had his time well under control. He took you out only once for luncheon. A second lunch was a waste of time. People, from the business point of view, either click the first time or must be disregarded. That applied to would-be friends too. If, however, he felt in a generous mood he took out an old-established friend and had a good giggle. But he could not giggle with a man like McKenna. He was certain of that. "This is a nice house," he said in order to put a final stop to that part of the conversation. "It's very kind of you to take me to my uncle. I wonder what he's like. My father used to say he was a terror. I'm always attracted by terrors."

"I'm very fond of him," McKenna said, "but I must admit that he isn't everybody's cup of tea."

"I love tea," laughed Leonard. One could, he decided, sell anything to Gloria and one could also have a giggle with her.

"It would do your uncle a lot of good if you went and stayed with

him," Gloria said. "You might, for instance, persuade him to have a wash."

From a distance there came the sound of Davy yelling. It had no volume. It was high-pitched and short and when it died down it shot up again.

"It must be a baby," Leonard observed. "Have you many children?"

"Only one," Gloria said. "A boy."

"And does he look like father or like mother?" He loathed that sort of talk. It was false Bohemian: no bourgeois would bother to ask such questions. But these good people were going to give him luncheon, so he had to say that as payment for the meal.

"He doesn't look like me," McKenna said. He was blushing and that annoyed him. "He's my wife's son by her first marriage."

"So he looks like mummy," Leonard smiled and with that, he was sure, he had paid for the lunch. Almost two lunches.

"He looks like nobody," Gloria said.

"Children usually look like nobody one knows," agreed Leonard. So she had been married before. Probably one of those Kenya divorces with three or more husbands. All he had heard about Kenya made him believe that it was a large, happy valley full of tasty scandals and tough, sunburnt, middle-aged men with large beards being called, "Boy." And all of them having red hairy knees. No doubt Gloria was of the giggling sort, though frankly, if he came down to it, he did not think much of the modern woman. If it must be a woman then let her be a real homely woman with large flapping breasts and then you could put your head on her bosom and there, well-ensconced, keep away creditors, insults, false friends and the other obnoxious things of life. But you must have a hangover to want such a woman. Now he had not a hangover. If only there were a middle way. There never was; and he sighed.

In the middle of luncheon he decided that notwithstanding her fine modern figure there was something unmodern about Gloria. She was not hardboiled.

"It must be great fun," she said, "to live in London the whole year round."

That gave her away. If you are a hardboiled woman London is not fun. Nothing is fun. He knew that. He knew a lot about that kind of thing. "Well," he said, "it is fun but I had to get away. I was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. There were moments when I nearly shrieked the house down. I say nearly because every time I wanted to kick and bite I invariably reminded myself that a rest was in store for me. Kenya, the wilds, a complete rest."

"I don't know what sort of rest you'll get in your uncle's house," McKenna said dubiously. When he went out to get the car Leonard said to Gloria, "Do you think your husband will be able to bring the old boy to his senses?"

"He will."

"How?"

"I don't know, but don't worry."

"Has he a strong influence on my uncle?"

"As a matter of fact he has a very strong influence. Your uncle is quite potty and he thinks my husband is God."

"God?"

"God." She giggled. "I can well imagine that he would appear as God to a certain type of person." She giggled and Leonard thought that she was sweet indeed. God, he said to himself as he came out into the heat and dust of the compound, ought to be taller than McKenna. Moreover God would not wear corduroy shorts. But as they drove along towards the Aberdares he was less sure of himself. You always are after luncheon. It is worse at six in the evening. Later you cheer up again. "He won't shoot at me through the window?" he asked playfully.

"He won't," McKenna laughed. "He isn't the shooting sort."

"But there must be many murders committed out here?" Leonard asked in a slightly pentecostal voice.

"No more than elsewhere."

"But what about that altitude and latitude business and Kenya madness?"

"Haven't met it. As regards the altitude and latitude I think they're a healthy combination."

"You're a very comforting chap." Perhaps he had been wrong about him. He would see.

"Here's the house. You'll rough it here all right."

"Not 'alf," laughed Leonard. "But please don't make him mad. I loathe scenes." He sat in the car and waited. A native came from a shed and walked towards the natives' huts which were on the edge of the cedar forest. He stared at the native because there was nothing else to look at. It turned out to be a woman. She was wearing khaki slacks and she was young and pretty and Leonard told himself that she must be his uncle's woman. The decorousness of her disguise made him laugh. Then he sighed, for, apparently, the bourgeois attitude was all over the world. She should be naked with the breeze on her young nipples and she ought to wear an expensive necklace from Cartier so that everybody should know that she was a mistress. McKenna came out.

"I've fixed it up," he said. "Come in."

"You're marvellous." And he thought that maybe after all McKenna was his uncle's God.

"So you're my bloody nephew," Adams said.

"I'm your bloody nephew. And are you my bloody uncle?"

"I don't like impertinence," Adams said. Leonard decided that was not the line to take with him. "I'm going to put you up for a week," Adams went on, "on the condition that you don't interfere with me and my way of living. I'm doing it as a favour to McKenna. Don't you forget that. I have a car. It's out there in the shed. I hardly ever use it. If you buy the petrol you can take it and drive about the countryside. I can't afford to take more burdens on my back than I already have, so you'll have to forage for yourself."

"But that's heavenly, uncle. It's exactly what I want."

"Come into the sitting-room," Adams said and led the way.

"You stand by me," Leonard whispered to McKenna.

They sat down and Adams talked to McKenna but now and then gave his nephew an incurious glance. "How is your father?" he suddenly asked.

"He's very well, thank you. He sends you all sorts of messages."

"Are you the only child?"

"We are three. You surely know that."

"Oh I suppose I do." Adams turned to McKenna but later he remembered his nephew. "You all live in London?"

"No, uncle. Father and my unmarried sister live in Surrey. I live in London."

Adams picked up a book. "I've read the book on Oliver Cromwell a second time. Now I can lend it to you."

Leonard looked at it. "Do you like it?"

"I think it's a very good book," said Adams.

"I'll have to tell Ken when I get back to town. He'll be delighted."

"Ken? Who is Ken?"

"Kenneth Stark, the man who wrote it."

"You know him?"

"Ken is a great friend of mine."

His battle was won. When McKenna left Adams was still questioning him about his friend Ken.

(II)

Gloria was reading on the verandah. She had had a hammock fixed between the wall of the house and a pillar; if Leonard could have

seen her now he would have said that the way she lay in the hammock was further proof that she was not hardboiled.

"I've fixed it up," McKenna said.

"How?"

"I've asked him to take his nephew in and he was very reasonable about it."

"Anyway his nephew is a hundred times nicer than he."

"I liked him. They're such poles apart that probably they'll get on well." Later he asked, "How is Davy?"

"Oh, he's all right." She thought that her voice had sounded uninterested, so she added enthusiastically, "He's a pet, isn't he?"

On the following day Leonard drove over in the ramshackle Ford and thanked them profusely. "My uncle is a perfect darling," he said. "And we're roughing it, you know."

They asked him to stay for luncheon and he chatted amusingly. Gloria enjoyed listening to his tittle tattle about people of whom she had never heard before; and since she knew nothing about them a rosy halo appeared behind every person he mentioned. "And the poor boy thought they would make him a member at White's but they didn't," said Leonard. "It nearly broke his heart." And Gloria nearly wept with pity.

"It must be great fun living out here," Leonard said later, "but this sort of life should only be an intermezzo."

"Wait till the bug bites you," McKenna said.

"I'm immune to bugs," Leonard said.

"But not in your uncle's house," Gloria said.

They both laughed and suddenly McKenna felt depressed because he too was immune to bugs yet continued to live two miles from the Equator and had no wish to go elsewhere. "Once in Kenya always in Kenya," he said. "I suppose that's what one calls being bitten by the bug."

"I think you're frightfully witty," said Leonard to Gloria and they laughed. "May I come and see you again?" he asked as he was going.

"Come as often as you want," Gloria said.

He gave her a long, pointless look. She looked away. She could do that very nicely. Nanny came across the compound pushing the pram. "That must be the infant," Leonard said. Nanny and pram disappeared through the nursery door.

"I'm glad you're enjoying your uncle's house," McKenna said. He noticed that the pram needed cleaning.

"I simply adore it," Leonard said. "He's a sweet person, believe it or not. But," he said leaning out of the car, "there is something terribly fascinating about his eyes. Have you noticed that?"

McKenna shook his head. "Then you're not observant. His eyes make me shudder at times. Terribly exciting." He waved his hand and drove off.

Gloria stood there and for a time did not move. "This heat makes me mad," she suddenly said. The cook came out of the kitchen and approached her. When there was only ten feet between them he asked her what they wished to eat for dinner. There was a leg of mutton and a shoulder of mutton.

"I'm sick of mutton," Gloria said petulantly. "All one does in this accursed country is to eat mutton, mutton and mutton."

The cook smiled ingratiatingly, for he did not understand a word of English.

"It is becoming monotonous," McKenna said.

"Monotonous," she said, and the cook ceased smiling on account of the anger in her voice.

"I'll go down to the swamp," said McKenna, "and see if I can get a duck."

"But that will still mean mutton to-night," she said.

"Anyway, there will be duck to-morrow," he said.

He waited till tea-time as it was no good going out in the heat of the day. There were not many pools left in the swamp. Most of them had dried up. But near the river there was a deep pool and it would take the sun another month or so to dry that up. The pool was flanked by the high papyrus reeds of the swamp on the one side and on the other a small promontory separated it from the river proper. The water was low. Deep in the swamp there was water; and pool followed pool. The high reeds, however, made it almost impossible to get into the swamp. The natives said there were hippopotami in the swamp. He had never seen any. Wild dogs lived somewhere on the dry islands and now and then you could hear their barking. There were pythons too. Several years ago McKenna had shot a python that had attacked one of his dogs. That happened deep in the swamp. When he came near to the dead python he retched. In retrospect he was rather ashamed of that.

Now he came down to the pool and Gloria was with him. Taciturn and a curious frown on her forehead. He had taken the retriever bitch along. She was gun-trained but was not steady any more. Too much chasing of vermin had caused that. She was on the lead and considered herself of importance and her tail wagged rapturously. They skirted the pool and stood between the reeds, so that the duck should not see them. The pool was smooth and empty. It was silent. It was the kind of silence you expect to explode any moment. On the other side of the river two Kavirondo cranes were walking. They

moved sedately and seemed conscious of their beauty. "They should be the emblem of conjugal fidelity," McKenna said.

"They're very pretty," Gloria said in a grudging voice. A herd of impala appeared later on. They advanced beside the river and were not afraid of the human shapes on the other side. "During the last drought," McKenna said, "they came to the water, simply clustered round the water. You could have touched them with your hand. Their docility must be a further sign of the drought."

"I was here during the last drought," Gloria said.

He gave her a quick look. "Anything the matter?"

"Nothing the matter. Why should there be anything the matter?"

"You don't sound very cheerful."

"I'm quite cheerful."

"I'm sorry," he said.

After a while she said, "There aren't any of those damned ducks about."

"We must be patient."

His patience was rewarded just before sunset. A pair of mallards came flying from the swamp. They appeared on the right and flew out to land, made a half circle and started to fly back to the swamp.

"They won't come this way," Gloria said gloomily.

She seemed right. They would be out of gunshot but the last moment they veered and quack-quacking noisily flew straight towards the pool. McKenna fired and missed the first duck; with the choke he got the second duck which fell straight into the pool. At a ninety degree angle it ceased to be a flying bird: it was a stone that somebody was throwing into the pool from a certain height.

"Damn," said McKenna as he reloaded his gun. He was thinking of the first duck which a few seconds later reappeared coming in in large circles, quack-quacking wildly, as though searching for its companion and perhaps bemoaning its fate at the same time. As it reached the last belt of reeds McKenna shot it; and he thought it had achieved what it wanted; and the duck fell into the pond not far from its dead friend. The sun was setting hurriedly. Red and orange rays swept the sky and the colour of the pool was red and orange too. The retriever bitch found the ducks and was exceedingly proud of herself. "We'd better hurry," McKenna said. "We don't want to be caught here in the dark. Let's cut across the island."

"All right," Gloria said.

The island was an island only in a manner of speaking. On one side was the river and on the other a dead water bed. That water bed was deep with mud, and here and there a stagnant pool bred mosquitoes by the legion. Bushes and reeds and undergrowth

protected it from the sun. The island was covered with trees. They had died with the tributary that used to flow through the water bed. Only their skeletons remained and they stood emaciated, menacing and full of reproach.

"I'll put her on the lead," McKenna said. He put the retriever bitch on the lead and her self-importance knew no bounds. The night was coming. The horizon behind was rosy but it was fading; the night was closing in like a steel door. The trees were lonely and did not care.

"What was that noise?" Gloria asked.

"Probably a bird."

They hurried on, hurrying against the night. The night would be the winner. "I don't think it's a bird," McKenna said. On their left the long papyrus wall was intently guarding the waterbed. "Don't walk so near to the papyrus," McKenna said. That moment a reed broke in the wall. Immediate silence followed.

They continued on their course which was more or less the middle of the island. But the waterbed had a course too which was capricious and full of bends and thus the wall of reeds came up to them, receded, then came up again. The trees towered above them, silent, waiting. And they were not waiting for life. They had long ceased to have anything to do with life. What else was there to wait for? Apparently the trees knew.

Another reed broke, and there came no silence, for the reeds were being gently pushed apart, and then a reed broke with the noise of an unexpected pistol shot. Then more noises followed. McKenna turned back. A large leopard emerged from the reeds. It looked as grey as the evening. It bounded across the clearance between the river and the undergrowth of a row of trees, and disappeared in the dusk.

"I hope we won't see him again," McKenna said. He only had Number 7 shot with him and you must shoot a leopard at very close quarters if you want to have a sporting chance with Number 7 shot. And even then a quick silent prayer is needed in case the hereafter suddenly opens up.

"A leopard," Gloria said. She said that calmly as though she were a guide pointing out famous spots. "I don't care."

"Let's hurry up," he said. "Take the dog if you don't mind."

The leopard was following them in the undergrowth. It kept its distance and kept pace with them. The trees began to enter the night, though at times as if disillusioned they stepped out of it and their rebellious shapes were noticeable once more. "There's a clearing over there," McKenna said. "Let's try and cross it."

It was not much of a clearing. Hardly room for one person to

cross. As they came up to it the leopard appeared. It was facing them. A silent obstacle. That was all it was. They turned away and in a little while they could hear it following them but on the other side. It must have darted into the papyrus wall. Now there was whistling overhead. Geese: last heralds of the last rosy cloud. It was too dark to see them.

"There is a large opening near the dip," McKenna said.

"I know." Gloria said.

"We could go towards the native shambas but it will be pitch dark by the time we reach it. I don't like leopards when it's pitch dark." He laughed softly and hoped she was not afraid. She said nothing. It was a five minutes' walk and those five minutes gave the night ample time to assert itself. The papyrus wall suddenly ended. There was a small stagnant pool, a black surface in the night. A rotting log floated in the middle. "Let's cross," McKenna said. "I'd better go ahead."

The papyrus continued on the other side of the pool, which was in fact an overgrown obese puddle. He waded into the water, he heard a sound in the papyrus. The leopard. He stopped in the middle of the pool and the muddy water was knee deep and smelt of slimy decay and the rotting log floated against his knee. Anyway, if the leopard jumped out of the reeds he would have a slight chance of shooting it at short range. "Hurry up," he called. She did not move. The retriever bitch was gently whining.

"Hurry up," he said again.

"Why?"

"For God's sake hurry up. What are you waiting for? For the leopard?" He shouted the last words.

She got into the stagnant water. She moved incredibly slowly. She passed him on her way to reach the other side. She was carrying the retriever bitch and she panted a little because the bitch was heavy. Passing him she said, "What's all this fuss about? I don't care a damn whether I get killed or not. Do you think I like this life? I hate it."

She climbed out on the other side. He followed her and fell in beside her. "That was very nice of you," he said.

"What was nice?"

"To carry that heavy beast."

She did not answer. They walked fast and their shoes made loud kissing sounds. "I suppose," she said after a while, "the leopard followed us because of the dog."

"I suppose so," he said.

They climbed the escarpment and there was Ali waiting with the lamp.

"Good luck, sir," he said. "Too very late with night walks."

"Give these ducks to the cook," McKenna said.

"Very good birds, sir. Sir, good shooting."

"I'm going to bed," Gloria said. "I don't want any food."

She turned away and went to her room. Her shoes were still making loud kissing sounds.

(III)

As Gloria awoke next morning she felt that something was terribly wrong somewhere; and it did not take her long to realise what was wrong and where. With the daylight spreading in her room she could not understand what had prompted her to behave like that down on the island. And the whole afternoon. She had been bloody the whole afternoon. But she had been far bloodier on the island. She got out of bed, put on her dressing-gown and went out. The sun was coming up for another day's complete rule. Frost lay on the ground and the sky was cloudless. The frost was getting ready to go and the haze of the heat would step into its shoes. The air was clear. Every bush, every tree was a separate independent entity. A little bird sat on a wild asparagus bush. The bird was a Hammer and Anvil bird and looked larger than lifesize in the clear light. Why had she been so awful last night? What would he say?

A native came from behind a shed and wanted to go to the kitchen for a little gossip. He saw her and made a detour. But she had seen him and called to him. He came sheepishly. "Get me the syce," she said.

She was not going to face him at breakfast. He must be angry, and he had every right to be angry. The syce appeared and she told him she wanted the pony saddled. She went indoors, washed and dressed and when she was ready she went to McKenna's door. She stopped, hesitated for a few seconds, then knocked on it. There was still time to retreat. Or there was no time. She did not know. Fascinated by the sound of her own knocking she waited. There came no answer, so she knocked again. After a few seconds she opened the door. The room was empty. Of course, she said to herself with a sigh of relief, he always got up early. At any rate she had done her duty. She hurried out, mounted the pony and rode off. On the other side of the bridge she saw a herd of impala near the road. Perhaps the same herd they had seen the evening before. The impala did not move till she got close to them. Then

a large buck leaped forward and the herd followed. In the distance two Grant's gazelles accompanied by the inevitable Kongoni were watching the commotion.

Gloria was completely oblivious of the antelopes and gazelles. It is not easy to think clearly without having trained oneself for it. She let a few thoughts materialise in her mind, but before they could develop she dropped them and sent others spinning only to drop them too in their turn. It was not an altogether unpleasant sensation. Newton was eating his solitary breakfast and when he saw her he stood up and with a piece of toast and marmalade grabbed between two sets of false teeth he came towards her.

"Where's Betty?" Gloria asked.

There were two courses open for Newton: either to swallow or to drop the toast. He believed in the line of least resistance, so he chose the latter. "She's still in bed," he said. He gave the toast a curious look. "Nothing wrong, I hope," he said.

"Why should there be anything wrong?"

"I don't know. Just occurred to me." He laughed.

"What occurred to you?"

"Nothing really," said Newton and in his utter confusion he picked up the toast.

"You always talk such a lot of rubbish."

"I do, don't I?" He put the toast into his mouth.

"I'll go to Betty," she said.

He had swallowed the toast. "Won't you have a cup of tea first?" He took his own cup and pushed it towards her.

"I'll have tea with Betty," Gloria said. She went indoors and Newton sat down and began to butter a piece of toast. Suddenly he laughed. "Fancy," he said to the quiet world around him, "paying a call at half-past seven in the morning."

"What's the matter now?" Betty asked. She was sitting up in bed with three large pillows propped up behind her. She looked surprisingly young, not so much on account of her features but because even early morning could not resist the youthfulness of her expanding spirit.

"What's the matter?" Gloria said. "Your idiot of a husband asked the same question. Why should there be anything the matter?"

Though Betty was the first person to call her Reggie an idiot and worse, she considered that her own privilege, and did not approve of it when coming from another source.

"I wouldn't be so quick in calling other people idiots," she said. "Especially if my name were Gloria and I were conspicuous for being an idiot myself."

"I'm sorry, darling," Gloria said. She sat down on the bed and patted Betty's hand. "I'm in awful trouble."

"What is it this time?"

"I made a scene yesterday." And she told Betty about the retreat through the island. Betty listened attentively. Once or twice she nodded and her nods implied that she was not surprised, quite the contrary, she had been expecting that.

"You're a bloody fool," she said.

"But what am I to do about it?"

"Nothing. Just say you were terribly frightened and lost your head and can't even remember what you said. Oh, if only our modern times hadn't killed the migraine."

"Why the migraine?"

"Because thirty years ago you could have said you had a migraine and nobody would have blamed you even if you had murdered somebody." She smiled broadly.

"But this isn't thirty years ago."

"In that case just do what I've told you."

"You are clever. But darling, will he believe me?"

"No; and you don't expect it."

"What do you mean?"

"David knows perfectly well that you don't care a rap for him."

"That isn't true."

"My dear girl, that man's no fool."

"He thinks I'm very fond of him."

"Does he?"

"He does." Gloria was angry. "There's a lot you don't know," she added. "You ought to see him when we go to bed at night. You'd be surprised, I can assure you. He always says that I'm the most wonderful woman he ever had in bed. There." Her face was red with anger.

Betty was disgusted. Such matters made her sick. They existed. She was too clever to deny their existence. But you go through them as through the other give-and-take penances of life and then do your best to forget them, and hope the next occasion will not take place for at least a week. She kept them at arm's length and hoped that by the time Reggie reached the age of fifty he would stop altogether. Now he was forty-five and at times she was in despair and thought that not even the rotund age of fifty would put an end to that superfluous, filthy nonsense. At other times, however, she was more hopeful. "I'm not interested in your antics," she said. "Dogs do that very well too. Especially bitches."

"Perhaps that's your way of looking at it but I don't think David

looks at it from that angle." Her eyes lit up. "Of course, darling, I know that you'd like to have a child delivered by parcel post and then fondle it for the rest of your life. I, for instance, didn't need the postman. I sympathise with your hatred of sex. It would be a bit silly if one couldn't ever get pregnant."

She blushed scarlet and was deeply ashamed of herself, for years ago Betty had told her that she could not have children. Now she was throwing it in her face. She was ashamed of herself, but why did Betty taunt her? She waited, expecting a terrible outburst.

But that was not Betty's line. She smiled and she said, "And talking of children you know as well as I that David only cares for your baby. He's devoted to him."

"And that's why he comes running to me every night. Darling, don't be silly."

"If you have such a wonderful hold on him then why come for my help? Why don't you go straight back to him, take your dress off, lie down on the floor and not worry about what you said to him last night?"

They were both furious. It was not the sort of fury that wishes to explode. It only wants to hurt: quickly and subtly, and then, of course, the control goes and it ends up in insults.

"Don't be common," Gloria said. "And, pray, why does he love Davy so much? It isn't his child."

"Because the poor fool believes that somebody else might grow up to be happier than he. You see, you poor sap, David knows he's a failure."

"A failure in what? He's a damned successful man."

"A failure in his relationship with life. But you are too stupid for me to explain. Perhaps he won't admit it, but he can't help knowing it. But I won't talk about that with a stupid cow like you."

Gloria burst into tears. "I'm not a cow," she sobbed. "I'm not a cow."

The tears had their immediate effect. Betty leaned forward and put her arm round her. That made Gloria cry more lustily. "I'm not a cow," she moaned.

They made it up in no time and Gloria, still sobbing, apologised for having called Betty a barren woman and Betty said she had not meant anything either. "Not even that about David being unhappy?"

"Not even that."

She kissed Betty's cheek. For a brief moment Betty saw her as a man would see her. The exquisite shape of the body, the firm yet not too small breasts and the curve of her neck; and for that brief moment she regretted her brains and envied Gloria, but it all went

and there was only her love for Gloria left. And perhaps for the child that had never arrived by parcel post.

"I'll get up and we'll have breakfast," she said. "I bet you're hungry."

"Yes, darling." She took out her cigarette case and offered Betty a cigarette. "The trouble is that David isn't human." Betty waited for her to go on. "I've met such a nice man," she went on. "Leonard Adams. He's that dirty madman's nephew. Have you met him?"

"No. But what has that to do with David?"

"Why can't David be like him? Why can't he be funny and amusing like most people one knows. He's like a railway time-table."

"But, apparently, he's quite satisfactory in other matters." She did not want to start a row again, so she said quickly, "You're a very lucky woman, Gloria. You have a nice husband who has more strength of character than the whole district put together; and he has a damned good brain too. He's a gentleman if ever there was one and he's rich and when his brother dies you'll be Lady McKenna and even more rich. What more do you want?"

"I don't care a damn about being a baronet's wife," Gloria lied. "Besides, his brother might live another twenty years. Invalids always go on for ever."

"You must have given the subject a considerable amount of thought."

"Not really. But I do wish one could have real fun with him. I used to have such fun with Miles."

"Anyway," Betty said quickly, "I must get up."

They had a long, agreeable breakfast. "Give my love to Davy," said Betty when Gloria could not postpone her departure any longer. "He's so cute." She grinned broadly. "If you ever have enough of him send him to me by parcel post."

"Oh, darling," blushed Gloria. She kissed Betty. "I'm a bitch, I know I'm a bitch. You'd make a splendid mother for him. Much better than this cow here." They embraced with deep affection.

She mounted the pony and as she reached the track which would lead her back to the farm, she saw Newton. He was exercising his dogs. He bowed to her gallantly.

"What does your husband think of the drought," he asked. "I'm getting a bit scared. Does he think it will last?"

"Reggie, you're an ass. David is very clever but not even he knows what the weather will do."

"It seemed to me he might have an idea."

Gloria waved to him and rode off. She was in great fettle. Life was not miserable. Who said life was miserable? Not she. She

had no worries in the world. Ten months ago she thought she would simply go under; and now she was on the top of the world. She reached the cross roads. "Slow up and hoot," said a notice. It made her laugh every time she passed it; for about three years ago from her car she had seen a rhino, covered with the swamp's mud, trotting past the signboard. Was the notice for lions?

There was a bridge to the right and a car was coming across the bridge. She was not interested in dilapidated Fords, but the Ford came to a halt. "Good morning," said Leonard. He got out of the car and came and stood beside the pony. "You're a perfect picture on horseback," he said.

"You don't want me to say the same about you and the Ford?"

"I hope not. Where are you going?"

"Home."

"I was just going for a drive." He patted the pony's neck. "I'm sure you're a frightfully good horsewoman."

"I love riding."

"And shooting lions. You fill me with awe."

"Is it as bad as that?"

"Not quite as bad."

This, he thought, was twopenny magazine conversation. She, however, liked it. Her husband did not provide her with magazine conversation. Most women like magazine conversation. The disadvantage of being a woman. "I wish," he said, "there were a pub round here and we could have a drink."

"You can't have pubs and lions."

"What about the Red Lion? Meux's beer?"

She laughed. "The nearest pub," she said, "is the Kampi ya Marwa Gymkhana Club. That's ten miles away. There is an hotel thirty-two miles away."

"May I take you there some day? I don't like gymkhanas in any form. Would you come?"

"I'd love to. One has so few enjoyments out here that one simply hasn't the guts to say no."

"You never say no?"

"No."

Her eyes were shining and they both laughed. It was getting better and better.

"How are you getting on with your uncle?"

"Fine. The old bird has taken a deep liking for me."

"I suppose most people like you."

"No, I've plenty of enemies. Great he-men don't like me."

"I don't like great he-men." She was not certain what he meant

by great he-men. He was tall and large but of course he was not a he-man. Far too sweet, she thought.

"Almost every woman I've met," he said, "dislike big he-men who smell from the armpit and knock you down with a stiff upperlip, and yet the legend of he-men still persists. I wonder why." She was wondering too.

A Chevrolet crossed the bridge and had to get off the road in order to circumnavigate the Ford. Eric sat in it. "Hullo, Eric," Gloria called and waved a hand. Eric waved too and drove on. He looked back before the car reached the cross-roads.

"Who was that young man?" Leonard asked.

"He's a sweet person," Gloria said. "He manages my farm."

"So you have a farm?"

"It adjoins my husband's farm."

"The lion hunter is a farmer, what-ho."

"A very bad farmer."

"You're delightful, my dear. I wish we were in town and then I'd ask you to come round to my flat and have a glass of champagne."

"Have you a nice flat?"

"Oh, it's tiny. Two rooms, bath, separate lavatory and kitchenette."

"Do you cook?"

"I'm not at all a bad cook. My speciality is Chinese food. My sitting room is Empire. A couple of Panninis and a large canvas by Robert des Ruines. There is an immense modern scarlet settee beside the fireplace to offset the severe effect of the Empire."

"How serious you are about it."

"But not about the bedroom, my dear. It's completely modern. I've designed the furniture. All white but the walls are cobalt blue. A good contrast. In the bedroom I have two Raoul Dufy water colours and a Bonnard. In the bathroom there are only taps." He laughed. "But I have an Utrillo in the hall. The eternal rue du Chevalier de la Barre."

"It must be a splendid flat," said Gloria in an awed voice.

"Nothing, just a joke. You ought to see some of the houses I've done. What is your farm like?"

"It's very flat." She glanced at her watch. "I must go. My husband is expecting me."

"The obedient wife. How charming."

"Don't be sarcastic."

"I'm not sarcastic. That's not my line of country. I'm far too nice to be sarcastic."

He smiled at her. It was a special smile and she appreciated it.

She responded quickly. He thought that it almost spoiled the fun because it was so quick and so straightforward. His mind was full of pigeon-holes. Her looks and disposition were upsetting the pigeon-holes. Her looks were one thing but her disposition demanded large hips and large breasts. It was all wrong but it was exciting. Anyway, it meant nothing in the long run. In a month or so he would be returning to Robert des Ruines. "I want you to do me a favour," he said. "Next week I'm going to write an article for a fashion magazine, on women in Kenya. Will you let me take a few snaps of you? They'll be published with the article. You know the sort of rot. Mrs. David McKenna. Her husband, Major McKenna, late of the R.E. owns large estates in the Colony. He is a brother of Sir Alastair McKenna, fifth Baronet. Beautiful Mrs McKenna is an intrepid horsewoman, lion shooting is her hobby and she has shot about a dozen lions. Needless to add she is an excellent and charming hostess. See article on the opposite page."

"But I've only shot two lions."

"That bloody magazine can take half a dozen."

"You'll let me have a copy?"

"Naturally."

She wanted to ask him to luncheon but on second thoughts it seemed to her that it would be preferable not to turn up with him on the farm. "You must come and see us soon."

McKenna was reading in the sitting-room. "Hullo, darling," she said and went up to him and kissed him on the mouth.

"Had a nice ride?" he asked.

(IV)

Nanny tucked the blanket round Davy. The large safety pins gleamed clean and strong in the lamplight. They would look after him and not let him kick the blanket off. They were the night-time representatives of Nanny. Davy yawned, moved a hand, then yawned again, then wanted to cry and then he fell asleep. She looked round the room. Everything was in its place; only a nappy had fallen off a chair. She went to pick it up. She disliked picking things up. It meant stooping. Though she was not fond of Africa she had decided to stay on for another five years or so. Not so much on account of bigger wages but because she could usually find enough coloured aids to pick things up. In England, so she gathered from colleagues with whom she corresponded, the servant situation was deteriorating rapidly. Nursery maids were becoming a rarity. Nannies were expected to do most of the work in the nurseries. Her

poor old back revolted against the egalitarian era that was coming into being. And it counselled her to stay on in Kenya. For Kenya was the last stronghold of weak spines. She picked up the nappy and opened the door and croaked, "Boy."

The nursery boy came with a pot of tea and three slices of bread, honey and jam. On a plate there were two oranges. Her evening meal. The fire was made up in her room; the boy pulled the arm-chair beside the fire and left her alone. She sat down. She ate sparingly as though sixty-five years of eating had made her tired of food. She drank three cups of tea, gave her slippers a long scrutinising look and from a pile of papers took her weekly Theosophical paper and settled down to read.

She felt the cold slipping in under the door. This was an unruly country, nature being the worst offender. It had no manners, and she knew no precedent for frosty nights and gruelling daytime heat. The hooting of the hyænas was unforgivable noisy behaviour. It was a wild alien land and if it were not for her back she would leave it at once. But she would go on being a nanny for another five years. That was her time limit.

In five years' time she would return to England, and share a cottage with her friend Nurse Parkinson. They were both hospital trained and full of nursing knowledge that had become obsolete thirty years ago. They had not yet made up their minds where they would take a cottage. Nurse Parkinson wanted to live in Weymouth in furnished rooms. However, the sea was not one of Nanny's friends. As unruly and bad-mannered as Kenya it was. A cottage, all on her own: a luxury she had never known and probably would not have time to enjoy. Not that she thought of that. A cottage in Surrey. Nurse Parkinson was slowly beginning to give in, provided it was near a bus route. Nanny after three years of correspondence on the subject had met her half-way. Let it be on a bus route as long as it was a cottage. It must contain a Welsh dresser and other choice bits of mournful furniture.

She poured out a fourth cup of tea and there was a knock on her door. Before she could say come in, Gloria walked in. "I'm not disturbing you, Nanny?"

"Not at all, Mrs. McKenna," she said and stood up. "May I offer you a cup of tea?"

"That's very nice of you."

Gloria was bored. The D.C. had sent a runner asking McKenna to come and see him. It was something to do with the drought and McKenna wanting to move his cattle to Government land on the Aberdares. So he went and said he might have to stay in the township

and then he would either eat at the club or with the D.C. He asked her if she would care to come and she said no. She disliked the D.C.'s wife because she made such a fuss of having twins. As if other people did not have twins too. But the evening was long. The minutes did not pass but seemed to remain stationary as taxi cabs on a rank. Then as a last straw a bat flew into the sitting-room and knocked against the walls drunk with blindness. After that it was out of the question to stay in the house any longer.

"My husband is in Kampi ya Marwa," she said. "It's this damned weather. We're in for a proper drought."

Nanny did not think much of the word damned. "Do you take sugar, Mrs. McKenna?"

"No, thank you, I never take sugar." Nanny wished she would leave her alone. "How's Davy?"

"Very well, but he cut himself with a toy this afternoon."

She stood up and fetched the toy motor-car which had had such a striking debut in the Savoy Grill. "I've taken it away from him, but I found it again in his pram this afternoon. It's a dangerous toy. All metal. I'll have to throw it away."

Gloria nodded. "I don't know who gave him that silly toy," she said. She was speaking the truth. She had forgotten about it long ago. "How many children have you looked after, Nanny? I suppose hundreds and hundreds."

"Forty-three," Nanny said with professional pride and the blurred faces of forty-three babies slid past without her recognising any of them.

"You must have had a lot of interesting experience."

"I wouldn't say that, Mrs. McKenna. Babies are very similar."

"I know," Gloria said with conviction.

"Parents," Nanny went on, "are a different matter, but usually my employers were kind people. If I may say so I'm rather choosy."

"You're perfectly right."

"Thank you, Mrs. McKenna. If I look back I can only find one instance when I had to give up my job because the behaviour of the lady of the house shocked me."

"Do tell me about it." She was trying to work up interest. Anything to keep time on the move.

"That was in Spain. I was looking after the baby of the Consul General." She mentioned a town of which Gloria had never heard. Or perhaps it was the way she pronounced the name. "She was a Mrs. Crosby. She was a very tall lady. She came to the nursery very seldom. That was very wise of her, I must say that in her favour. We nurses don't like interference. Too many cooks spoil the broth."

Gloria nodded. "But one morning Mrs. Crosby did come to the nursery and I don't think she could have chosen a more unfortunate time. There is always very much to do in the morning.

"I know," Gloria said quickly.

"She wouldn't go, she stayed there and I think she stayed at least half an hour." What a monstrous thing to do, said Gloria's eyes. "Next morning," Nanny said dramatically, "I heard that she had run away with a foreigner, a Spaniard. They all look like gypsies. Naturally, I left that post immediately."

Gloria wanted to ask many questions. The story was interesting. "Did it come as a surprise?"

"A painful surprise. Mr. Crosby, the Consul General, was very upset. But you must admit, Mrs. McKenna, that it wasn't a savoury situation. There was nothing else for me to do but to go away. As I've said I left next day."

"When she came to the nursery was she excited? Or sad? How did she behave?"

Oh, there were so many questions she wanted to ask, but Nanny was not willing to explain. "But did she fondle the baby or behave like somebody who is saying good-bye?" Not only was her curiosity aroused but her sense of the dramatic too.

"She just walked about," Nanny said, "and if I remember rightly she would sit down then get up and then sit down again. Demented, I call that."

"It must have been a terrible ordeal for her."

"It was an ordeal for me to have been mixed up with such a family."

"The car." Gloria got up. "My husband will be looking for me. You'll have to tell me more about that woman. It's a frightfully interesting story. Good night, Nanny, and thanks for the tea."

"Good night, Mrs. McKenna."

(V)

Laborde was already awake. He had told his boy to wake him at six; because he hated to rise early he had slept badly. He lay on his back and thought he would light the first sweet cigarette of the morning. But if he took the packet off the table he would have to admit the fact that he was completely awake. An hour of sleep stolen. He liked property, though he possessed little in that line, and therefore it hurt him to throw that hour away, officially so to speak. He sighed and found a cigarette and lit it. Daylight was coming in through the open window and the room was shaking off the night. It was not much of a room. Six empty petrol boxes nailed together formed the cupboard.

A greenish faded curtain hung in front of the contraption and the early morning draught waved it gently. The cigarette was as good as he had anticipated. The boy would come in an hour's time. Plenty of time in the meanwhile; so he began to think of his loneliness.

The thought of being lonely came to him most poignantly in the morning. During the day he rather liked it. In the evenings there was whisky. But the mornings were bad. Bad and empty and not even the first cigarette could make up for them. Often as he awoke and before reality entered into him, he tried to imagine that a woman lay beside him. The warm body of a woman and through her a well populated understanding world. It was lovely to imagine that, though he did not manage to delude himself: throughout the process he knew there was no woman. Why was he such a lonely man? Why was he the only lonely man in the world? Everybody else was busy, either with their families or with their jobs or pleasant relaxation. And he was left out of it. In such moments of furious, unhappy meditation he often got frightened, for he might lose his friends. There were two: McKenna and Adams.

When he had met McKenna he thought he had met a fellow sufferer. They would put their loneliness side by side and then perhaps they would not be so lonely. McKenna, however, eluded him. Either he was less lonely or more shy. Probably both. But he loved him: there was no other word for his devotion. He could have lived contentedly with him on a desert island. If McKenna died his own strings would all become loose. Nowadays a terrible fear gnawed at his loneliness. Soon McKenna's brother would die, and then he would be the baronet, twice as rich as at present, and inevitably would go and live in England. If Alastair had known how hard Laborde prayed for the restoration of his health he would have been moved. When McKenna had married Gloria he felt safe. He might see less of him but he would remain within his orbit. In fact anchored to it through marriage. But when the brother dies, Gloria would not like to be Lady McKenna on a farm in the backwoods of Africa. He had not formed an opinion of her. She was, as it were, outside his ken. Therefore he was sure she was ambitious, snobbish and full of design. And, of course, full of charm. But he had lost the habit of women's charm and so he had no excuse for her. She would take his friend away from him, and then what would he do?

He sighed as he put out his cigarette. He did not love Adams. At moments he thought he hated Adams. Their friendship was based on a lot of make-believe. It was like children trying to play at being king and queen. Laborde was not a well-read man and whenever he got entangled in discussions with Adams he had to rely on his brain.

He was proud of that brain because it worked quickly and often furnished him with ideas and notions of no value whatever. Adams, he suspected, had not much brain, but on the other hand he read voraciously, had a retentive memory and was as silly as a small kid. His brains and Adams's reading. But whereas he would have sold his soul to help, even to amuse, McKenna, he would not lift his little finger to help Adams. Now and then, in fact more often than not, the metaphysical trash which Adams talked made him fidgety. During the day and in the evening he dismissed them by saying that Adams was potty, but now before his cup of tea he suspected Adams of trying to act the madman as it was more difficult to simulate sanity than madness. He was beginning to work himself into a rage. Adams was a sham, Adams had chosen to live like a pig because he had not the guts to live any other sort of life.

It was true that Adams was devoted to McKenna. That was the only thing in his favour. But he did not understand a word he read, his mind picked up other people's ideas without understanding them. He did not wash. Not because he was a hermit but because it was too much hard honest work to keep his ears clean. He trembled with rage, and then the boy came with the tea and he drank it quickly, burning the tip of his tongue, and he raged no more and was not lonely either.

By the time he had dressed he decided to go to Adams and have breakfast with him. The nephew was an amusing person. A new face; and he rather liked him. He would not linger over his breakfast. McKenna was starting to move his cattle to-day. He had promised to help. To be precise he had offered to help and McKenna accepted his offer, though Laborde guessed that he did not think much of the help he was going to give.

He drove along the track that led past the cedar forest. It was a bright morning with the sun beginning to get into position. "It's never going to rain again," he said. A lonely oryx was trotting ahead of the car. Laborde sounded the klaxon. The oryx trotted faster and then it started to lollap clumsily, turned off the track and barged into the forest. Above him, at the imaginary height of numberless feet, a vulture hovered. "Having the time of his life."

"Good morning," said Leonard who was walking sedately along the track. "I'm having my early morning exercise. Matutinal is the right word."

"Get in."

"You tempt me," Leonard said and got in beside him. He was wearing white breeches and polo boots. As a matter of actual fact he could not ride. "I'm trying to get my weight down," he said con-

fidentially. "I weighed myself yesterday, in the duka at Kampi ya Marwa. I've lost four pounds in a month. That's quite good, isn't it?"

"I wouldn't worry," Laborde said. "I weigh sixteen stone and don't give a damn."

"But fat ages one, and there are always beastly people who make allusions to it."

A native woman with two totos came towards them. The breeze seemed to move the long ear lobes of the woman.

"They're very inelegant creatures," Leonard said.

"Hear you took Gloria to dance in Nyieri. Was it fun?"

"Great fun. They're so sweet, Gloria and her husband. I couldn't like them more. I asked him to come too, but he's a bit of a hermit, isn't he?"

"What about your uncle?"

"He's a caveman. That's different."

An hour ago Laborde would have denied that Adams was a caveman; and he would have had a lot more to say. But now all he said was, "The caveman with the reduced price catalogue of the Times Book Club."

"You're frightfully witty."

Laborde's fat cheeks blushed with pleasure.

They found Adams outside the house. He looked frail in the morning-light, and his tattered khaki suit hung on him as though it had been dropped on him from a considerable height. "I slept very badly last night," he said.

"I'm sorry to hear that, uncle," said Leonard, speaking as a well-behaved boy speaks to an uncle when expecting a tip. "And when I fell asleep," Adams went on, "I had the most terrible nightmare."

"As you gave up Freud years ago," Laborde said, "you surely don't care a damn about your nightmares." That was the last straggler of his early morning thoughts.

"Of course I've given him up," said Adams. "He's an ass."

"I don't know about that," Leonard said. "He might make a come-back. He's so comforting."

"Let's eat," Laborde said. "I must leave you in half an hour. I'm helping McKenna to move his cattle."

Adams led the way into the sitting-room which was a little tidier thanks to Leonard's efforts. "And why is McKenna in such a hurry to move his cattle?" Adams asked.

"Because he isn't a fool and doesn't want to lose them."

"The capitalist," Adams said. "Pure materialism. The trouble

with him is that he's too lucky. Everything belongs to him and nothing must be lost because it would be a personal loss. On top of it all he's the sea-green incorruptible without any revolutionary tendencies."

"You're talking through your hat," Laborde said. "McKenna isn't a materialist. Fundamentally he's a mystic. He wants to save the life of his beasts because it is his duty as a mystic."

Leonard was smiling and he was afraid lest he might burst into laughter.

"He's not a mystic," Adams said. "He's the typical service man. Mind you, I didn't say he's a typical army man. He just believes in service. He'd make just as good a D.C., a clergyman or a prime minister."

"I repeat he's fundamentally a mystic. If he weren't one he'd be a colonel by now."

"You're not a colonel and nobody would call you a mystic."

"No, I'm not a mystic." Laborde laughed indulgently. "But where does Robespierre come in?"

"I've been re-reading Carlyle's French Revolution. It's a great book."

"I repeat McKenna is a mystic."

"Rot. A mystic is a man who is capable of doing anything when driven by that mysterious force. He can kill if necessary. McKenna couldn't kill anyone."

"I don't think you know what a mystic is."

"I know because I'm one."

"But uncle, surely, you couldn't kill anyone," said Leonard.

"I know I could."

"I doubt that," Laborde said and sniggered.

Then he began to stare at Leonard as though he were seeing him for the first time.

"What's the matter?" Leonard asked.

"Oh, nothing," said Laborde. He stared at him harder, then he said apologetically. "I'm sorry." He turned to Adams. "He's the spit of Miles. Looks exactly like him."

Now Adams stared at Leonard. "You're right in a way," he admitted grudgingly. "Not the spit of him but there is a resemblance."

"Resemblance? Don't be stupid. He looks exactly like him."

"You will exaggerate," sighed Adams. "Still, the resemblance is there."

"Could you perhaps tell me who Miles was?" Leonard asked.

"He was Gloria's first husband," Laborde said.

"Really?" Leonard was interested. "He must have been a very nice person," he giggled.

"He was in many ways," Laborde said. He thought for a second. "Don't mention it to McKenna. He probably hasn't noticed it."

"That's very wise," said Adams.

"But why?" asked Leonard blushing. "What's so awful about my looking like her first husband?"

"Nothing," said Adams dryly, "but why bring the subject up? Now she's married to McKenna and Miles is dead and that should be that." He spoke solemnly.

"I feel crushed," said Leonard. "I ought to buy myself a new face."

"And a new figure," said Laborde. "He had a similar figure."

"Now don't get beastly about my poor figure," Leonard said. A new giggle and the blush was gone.

"I think," he said when Laborde rose from the table, "I'd like to see how cattle are moved? May I come along?" He gave the best of his many smiles. "I've seen immense herds moving across mountains in the cinema. I'd like to see it in reality. Probably pure anti-climax."

"Come along," said Laborde.

In the car Leonard asked, "Was he a nice person?"

"Who?" asked Laborde not too pleasantly.

"The first husband."

"I don't know. He was and he wasn't, we all have our faults and de mortuis. . . ." He shrugged his shoulder. "Forget it. On second thoughts you don't really look like him."

"I've forgotten it," said Leonard. "But I must tell you I'm falling for Kenya in a big way. I'll stay here another month."

"I for one wish I could go away and come back when the rains come."

"It begins to look very dry."

"Begins? It is dry. Do you know at times I can almost hear nature crying, 'Give me a little water.'" As that was far too much like imaginary talk, Laborde quickly added, "I'm talking rubbish."

Leonard looked carefully at the dry land. Perhaps the earth was crying.

(VI)

Davy was crying. He was crying without anger or malice. He was hungry and waiting for his breakfast. McKenna heard him in the office. Eric was there, and Masai and five boys stood outside the window waiting for instructions. "You," said McKenna pointing

to a tall Lumbwa, "you will start half an hour after the heifers and whatever happens the bulls must be kept away from the heifers. The older bullocks will go in front of the bulls." The herd rolled his eyes and promised to keep the bulls away.

"I thought," McKenna said to Eric, "of sending the bulls to-morrow but I think it's best if they all move to-day."

"But," said Eric in his earnest young voice, "you're sending the slowest beasts last. Shouldn't they go first. It will be easier for the others to catch up with them."

"No," said McKenna, "the fast ones should go first, if the slow ones went first they would hold up the fast ones. The fast ones won't hold up the slow ones."

"Yes," said Eric, "that's common-sense." And he wished that McKenna had stayed in the army; for by now he would be a general and could lead brigades and divisions and perhaps army corps into action and win the battle. If there were no war he would be prepared to provoke one in order to see his idol moving all those armies and divisions about.

"Wait a moment," said McKenna. "I'll be back in a minute."

The first contingent, the young bullocks, were streaming down the ridge. They streamed down like that every morning on their way to pasture; but to-day as the drought was driving them from their home, they were a pathetic, brave lot of bullocks.

McKenna went to the nursery verandah. "Davy," he said. Davy made an effort to sit up and did not succeed and howled a little louder. "Davy," said McKenna again, and Davy said "Gully-gully," or something to that effect. Though a couple of tears were still to come his lips were already smiling.

"You're a good boy," McKenna said. He could not get over the surprise that one could begin to speak to Davy and even have the impression that he understood. Then for no reason whatever Davy burst into tears again. "You mustn't cry." Davy ceased crying and said, "Gully-gully."

McKenna saw Nanny coming and he waved to the child and it was so quick that Nanny did not notice it.

"I'm bringing him his breakfast, Major McKenna," Nanny said.

"Oh good," he said and went back to his office.

"What am I to do with the cattle on Gloria's farm?" Eric asked.

"They'll go early to-morrow. They don't matter." Those were the weak and the sickly ones. Some of them would die on the way. "Ten cows will stay on. Now, Eric, let's go and have breakfast. After breakfast take the lorry and drive all the tackle we prepared last night to that hut on Government land. It was decent of the forestry officer

to let us have that hut. There are six huts on the slope, so the boys will be all right."

The land he had leased was beside the forest stretching up the Aberdares. The grass was plentiful but of the unsweet variety and he could well visualise the amount of cattle he might lose from gall sickness. Still, they would die of malnutrition if they stayed here. Somehow he was very sorry for the cattle and wished that a band playing the *British Grenadiers* was marching in front of them. "Then come back," he continued, "and round up the lot on Gloria's farm. No, let them leave this afternoon and they can camp outside the township. You, generally speaking, will have to live with the cattle while they're away. You don't mind?"

"Mind? Of course I don't mind."

"You're a fine chap, Eric."

They passed Nanny sitting beside the cot. With his face smeared with food Davy turned his head towards them and smiled.

"He's a sweet little fellow," Eric said.

"He has Miles's very sociable disposition."

"I wish," said Eric, "he were your child." Then he blushed.

"Makes no difference. It doesn't matter who planted the three umbrella thorns on the ridge. As a matter of fact I'm speaking of the tree in the middle. It doesn't matter who planted it. All that matters is that it's a beautiful tree."

For Eric his words were a message from the greatest poet in the world; and his employer was a philosopher of immense standing too.

Gloria was on the verandah. Though the boys had swept the floor clean before the table was laid, dry dust was already covering the boards. "The heat," she said, "will drive me crazy." She looked so fresh that every word sounded like a separate lie.

"It doesn't seem to affect you," Eric said admiringly. For him Gloria was the most wonderful woman in the world; and she was exactly the wife for McKenna. The fact that she was his wife was a further proof of her good taste and of the proper scheme of things.

Two stray bullocks were being chased through the garden.

"I hope to God," she said, "they won't destroy the roses." For notwithstanding the drought the gardener had to water the roses every day. The furrow had dried up, so the water cart had to go as far as the river in which there was but little water left. Two boys chased the bullocks away and the roses were saved. "Thank God," breathed Gloria. "A car," she said. She had an excellent ear for cars. Since cars were more or less the only means of transport

from farm to farm, the coming of a car stood for surprise and excitement.

"It must be Laborde," said McKenna.

Gloria realised there would be neither surprise nor excitement. Ali appeared in the doorway. "Bwana Laborde," he said.

Ali was an upset man. All these comings and goings on account of the drought were not signs of good luck. Things were far from right, and generally speaking he did not like the situation. At odd moments he thought that the end of the world was approaching in the shape of his death. He waited in the doorway till Laborde and Leonard reached the verandah. He shut the door, looked at his dark toes and sighed and went back to McKenna's bedroom. The basset hound was lying beside the bed. "You get out, we close," Ali said. He had learnt that compact expression in the days he used to be a bar steward in Eldoret. The basset hound stretched, gave him a baleful look and left the bedroom. Ali felt slightly better.

(VII)

"Your husband," said Leonard, "didn't seem to want my help." The car with McKenna and Laborde was disappearing towards the bridge.

"It was kind of you to offer to help," Gloria said. She spoke in a distant voice. Since he had kissed her the other night at Nyeri she had given it so much thought that as a result Leonard had become almost a complete stranger.

"I've been out here nearly six weeks," he said. "I might have been quite useful." Cows with calves were moving towards the ridge. There was plenty of lowing. "They are sweet, those calves," Leonard remarked. "Have a cigarette."

"No thank you," she said. He was not going to get away with that. "Apparently," she said, "they've left you on my hands."

"I'm enjoying it." He took hold of her right hand but she pulled it out of his light grasp.

"I want to go for a walk," she said. "Do you want to come or do you want to sit down in an armchair and read?"

"I didn't come to Kenya to read."

"I often wonder why you came to Kenya at all."

"To break a lot of hearts," he giggled. "May I go for a walk with you? Please."

"I don't mind if you come."

They went across the compound. "I'd love to see your farm," he said.

"All right, we'll go there."

They walked in the dust and she was walking fast. "I think," said Leonard, "that you're the sweetest woman in the world."

"Stop that drivell." He laughed. He thought it was wise to laugh. "There's nothing funny about it," she said and walked faster. He watched her from the corner of his eye. She was pretty, amazingly pretty and her anger somehow brought out her prettiness. But, he said to himself, she was not his cup of tea. Few outsiders were. He took them as they came and invariably remained on the right side of complications. She was throwing a scene because he had kissed her. Well, he had kissed all sorts of people in his life and with the exception of a mild case of blackmail those kisses had mattered neither one way nor the other.

Gloria was ahead of him. She was walking superbly, he had to admit that; but gosh it was hot. She should not walk so fast.

"How nice it is here," he said suddenly. There were bushes right and left and a few trees. The swamp was ahead of them.

"I'm going to sit down here," Gloria said and threw herself on the ground.

Schoolgirl technique, Leonard thought. He sat down beside her. They sat in silence and then he heard some noise, "What's that?"

"Don't get frightened, it's just a few sick cows."

"I'm not frightened. If a lion comes I know you'll defend me."

"What you really need is a strong man to look after you."

Leonard blushed and then giggled. "Oh, my dear, you are fun."

"I'm not fun," she said. "If you think that you can have fun with me, then you're not only mistaken but are making an ass of yourself."

"Go on."

But she did not go on. He was smiling at her and because it was a genuine smile some of it was reflected in his violet eyes. They were beautiful eyes and in that slowly fattening face they were the emblem of something great, lost and moving. She stared at him hard. He thought he would not look away but let his eyes calm her and take her out of her peevishness and make her behave like the woman of the world she should be. I don't want complications, nor do you, smiled the eyes. However, Gloria sat rigid and was staring back at him, then she lay back a little and her elbows relaxed; but not her eyes.

"I could watch you like that for hours," Leonard said.

Her eyes still held him. "I'm going to kiss you," he said.

"No," she said and shook her head.

Leonard did not move. If he had followed the usual course he would already have kissed her. But many thoughts and notions

began to jump about in his head, and they first came one by one and then they came in a rush. "I'm going to kiss you," he declared challenging that rush. He leaned forward and put his arm round her and he was going to put his face on her breast and smile disarmingly into her eyes and only afterwards kiss her. His technique deserted him. He started to kiss her as any fumbling strong village yokel would kiss on a Sunday night after the local had closed. He held her fast and she did not resist, and they lay in a long embrace, and Eric who almost fell over them, had time to tiptoe away unperceived.

"I love you," Leonard said as his lips let go of her mouth. That was the last thing he wanted to say.

"Do you really love me?" Gloria asked. The lipstick was a bit smeared but her hair was unruffled and so was her face, but the eyes shone. I have conquered, they said and in their utter glorious naïveté they made Leonard say, "I love you terribly. I wish you'd come away with me."

"I can't," she said, "Darling, I can't." She thought of that woman in Nanny's Spanish nursery; but it was not for her. "I can't," she added with a sigh. "Darling."

"I've never met a woman like you." Which was true. For she was both the thin elegant creature and the Rima of hangover mornings. "I can't go without you. You must come with me."

He began to think hard, sentimentally and practically. It would shake some people in London if he turned up with this wonderful woman. Shake them? They would not talk of anything else for days. "Did you hear, darling, that Leonard has run away with a madly beautiful woman in Kenya? Who'd have believed it?" Not he. He would have been the last to believe it. He was not going to épater le bourgeois: he was going to épater Leonard Adams. "You must come with me," he said and kissed her again. Then he stroked her hair and said, "Gloria, you can't leave me. Sweetie pie, you're coming with me to London. You don't want to live in this wilderness, my love. Duckie, you must have fun. You're not a hermit. We're going to have a wonderful time. I've so many exciting friends. Gloria, you'll simply love them. We'll have parties and we'll giggle and shriek and be gay. Enough of this solemn life. It isn't fit for you."

"But my husband?"

"It's just too bad for him. Poor chap. He's a nice bloke and I like him. I'm not prejudiced. But he isn't the man for you. He's like a William Kent. What you need is a Riessner." He saw that Gloria did not understand the allusion. "No heavy English furniture for you. You must live surrounded by Louis XVI."

"I've been a good wife to him and I want to go on being a good wife to him. I'm not a whore."

"You a whore?" Leonard laughed out loud. "Darling, you're no more a whore than that tree over there. You're the last woman in the world who could be a whore."

He said that with such sureness that she felt annoyed. "You never know," she said darkly. She stood up. He remained on the dead ground and looked up at her long legs and knew she would say yes in the end: and oh, what fun was in store for them. Suddenly he thought of her first husband. He wanted to ask her if he really resembled him, but he was no fool. It was not his line to represent a memory. "We must leave soon," he said quickly and forcefully.

"It isn't lunch time yet."

"I didn't mean leaving here, you silly. I meant we must leave for London. When? Next week?" He was in a hurry; he might recant and change his mind. He felt a rather uncertain Pepin le Bref.

"But I haven't said yes."

"Yes, you have."

"No, I've said no."

"Then say yes quickly." He jumped up, embraced her, kissed her. "You're so beautiful."

She kissed him fondly: it was nice to be called beautiful and her appreciation was in her eyes. "I've got to think it over."

"I can see you walking up and down, your hands behind your back like an old German professor, thinking it out. Darling, you're too sweet for words."

"Come over to-morrow morning at ten. We'll meet down here and I'll let you have my answer."

"I can hardly wait," Leonard said and somehow he was relieved that nothing would be decided till to-morrow. She became matter of fact. "Time we walked back."

He put his arm round her but as they emerged into the plain he dropped his arm and there before them were the sick cattle moving towards the road. They were a mournful sight. "Hullo, Eric," Gloria called. Eric was with the cattle. He did not seem to hear. She called out again, "Come here, Eric." He came slowly and his face was solemn. "Do you know," she said to Leonard, "that Eric has never been to England?"

"Not really? I can't believe it."

Eric mumbled something about him having to go with the cattle and left them. "Such a nice person," Gloria said. "I like him immensely."

"But I like you," said Leonard. He was beginning to feel flat. "I adore you."

(VIII)

The bullocks had reached the township. It was lucky that the township was not in quarantine. It usually was. The dust of the road was churned up by the cattle and it did not settle down but remained in mid-air seated on the heat. The Lumbwa herds were shouting and now and then a bullock frisked off the road and while the herd went in search of it some other beast detached itself from the convoy.

"They're a fine lot of cattle," the D.C. said to McKenna. "Of course you're the best farmer in the district." The D.C.'s long thin body swayed like a gumtree.

"Of course he's the best farmer," Laborde said. "Though it isn't difficult to be the best farmer with men like Adams and myself about."

"Adams is a continuous source of trouble," the D.C. said shaking his head.

"He's just potty," Laborde said.

"Don't get catty," McKenna said.

"It's time we ate," the D.C. said.

"It was very nice of you to ask us," McKenna said.

"My wife will be delighted," the D.C. said.

"Where's Eric?" Laborde asked. He was taking the thing very seriously. Like most people who do little, he was ready that day to overdo his share in the moving.

"He'll turn up in time," McKenna said.

"He's a fine young chap," the D.C. said. "He's good. Good is an underrated word these days. But Eric is fine and good." He was an enthusiastic man of thirty-one.

"We're all good," sniggered Laborde. "One gets too bored to be bad."

The D.C. thought that a poor remark. His residence faced the flagstaff. Members of the Defence Force would mount guard round the flagstaff on Armistice day which was only a fortnight off. Laborde loved watching Armistice Day parades. If his Mahrattas had presented arms like that, God alone knew what he would have done to them. Nevertheless he came on every Armistice Day and his fat cheeks got purple with laughter.

"Alice dear," the D.C. said, "here are our guests."

Laborde sat down in an armchair near a small table on which stood

a bottle of Plymouth Gin and a bottle of McAllum's Perfection. He had not a high opinion of the D.C.'s hospitality and was determined to improve on it if there came a chance. The D.C. believed in Native Paramountcy and was always ready to mete out a fine to the white settler; but he did not believe in giving you more than one drink. The D.C.'s wife began to show off the twins. They were small and puffy with dribbling mouths and not too dry nappies. Laborde hoped he would not be asked to go into raptures; he liked Davy; and his shrewd, unambitious old mind often congratulated Davy for having improved, without any effort, his condition in the world. Imagine if Miles had lived on. He liked Miles but Miles's inherent weakness had made him impatient with Miles's troubles. It would not have been fun to go on being a poor weak man's son. By now, probably, the cot would have been sold at an auction and Davy would be lying on the naked floor. He was exaggerating and it suited his mood.

"Gin and It?" the D.C. brayed.

"I'll have a Scotch and soda, if I may."

"Help yourself," the D.C. said disapprovingly.

That was exactly what Laborde wanted. He waited till the D.C. went off with two glasses half-filled with reddish liquid and he poured himself a large whisky. That was better.

"Angela is prettier," the D.C.'s wife said, "but I think Pam will have more brains."

They were stupid and ugly as far as Laborde was concerned. They would, he thought, grow up to be heavy hoydenish girls full of pimples and ending up by falling in love cooly and perspiring. He refused to look at them. He examined the room with detachment. He had known four D.C.'s in that room. Each of them had put his personality in the shape of chintz, settees and family photographs in silver frames into it. The room had no more mystery for him than a hotel bedroom.

"Luncheon is served," said the mother of twins. The dining-room was prim and proper. An Adam walnut sideboard made in Edwardian days was the one innovation since the last D.C. (Apart from a silver frame which now contained the picture of an elderly woman; on the same mantelpiece there used to be in the days of the previous D.C. the photograph of a benign parson.)

"One day," the D.C.'s wife said as she doled out the chops, "You must bring little Davy to play with my children."

"I should like to bring him," McKenna said. "It's queer to think of his wanting to play with other children. He seems so self-sufficient."

"Mint sauce?" she asked.

"When a child is born," McKenna said, "he is amazingly old,

and then it gets younger as time goes by and then you realise that it has become so young that it has time only for other children."

"That's a very witty remark," the D.C. said. "What did Bernard Shaw say about children?"

"Never heard of him," Laborde said and shook with laughter.

The D.C. and his wife always made him feel nasty.

"I'm not clever enough to understand your argument, Major McKenna," the D.C.'s wife said. She was flustered and anxious and hoped he liked the food. The roast potatoes were a little burnt and she prayed he would not notice that. You should not, she miserably admitted, serve burnt potatoes to the richest settler in the district. Laborde began to enjoy himself. A native came and whispered something to the D.C. "Eric is here," the D.C. said. "We'll ask him in." He went out and returned with Eric. "He says," he bleated, "that he hasn't time to eat a chop with us."

"I've a lot to do," Eric said to McKenna. "I've got the sick ones off. We had to leave twelve behind; they'd have died on the way. Now I'm going to the new place to have the huts cleaned."

"Don't take it so seriously," McKenna said. "You've plenty of time to eat. Relax, Eric. The day is still young; and so are you."

But nothing in this world was young for Eric. Everything was aged and that included disappointment, vice, and disloyalty.

"I must go," he said. "I must."

"Excuse me," McKenna said and rose and followed Eric into the sitting-room. "Anything wrong?" he asked.

"Nothing. Are you going back to the farm?"

"Some time."

"I wish you would go back now. I don't like leaving all the boys alone."

"You know they can be left alone. But I'll go back to please you." He patted Eric's shoulder and the young man seemed relieved. "Don't overwork yourself," McKenna called after him as he left; then went indoors.

"Newton was here this morning," the D.C. said. "He won't move his cattle. He says he has a feeling that the rains will soon come."

"Newton," said Laborde, "is so stupid that if he'd decided to move his cattle the rains would have started at once."

"In a sense," McKenna said, "I've moved my cattle because I hoped that just to spite me the rains would come. It's like lighting a cigarette in a restaurant while waiting for the next course. The moment the cigarette is lit the next course comes. Even if it rained it would do my land a lot of good."

"I fully agree with you," the D.C. said. McKenna was a man

after his heart. A man of foresight and the brother of a baronet. If only all his settlers were like McKenna how proud he would be of his district.

Coffee was served in the sitting-room. Laborde wanted to thank his hostess in his own way. Deep hatred was mounting in him. "I remember," he said, "the last time I drank coffee in this room. That was when Hanson was the D.C. His wife was such a charming woman and an admirable hostess. Here I sat drinking coffee with her and neither she nor I would have believed that in three months' time she'd elope with a silly young boy from Molo. You know he got sick of her by the time they arrived at Genoa and the poor woman jumped out of her hotel bedroom." He smiled gently and he was delighted because his story had exactly the effect he wanted it to have.

As they came out into the gruelling heat McKenna said, "You shouldn't have said that. Frightfully bad taste."

"I know, but I don't like her. A self-satisfied bitch. You're not self-satisfied."

"I think I'm self-satisfied."

"No, you're not. What are we going to do now?"

"We'll go back to the farm to please Eric. I'll shove you in to the guest room and make you rest for an hour. Then we'll drive out to the cattle."

First, however, they went to the post office and the Babu said that two telegrams had arrived for McKenna, but Eric had collected them in the morning. The Babu shook his head dolefully.

"He'd have given his eyes for you to ask him what was in the telegrams," Laborde said.

"I'll find out when I get home." But he forgot about them. Ali told him that Gloria had ridden over to Betty but would be back before dinner. Laborde was feeling drowsy. The drive had, so to speak, blown his energy away: moreover he had eaten copiously and what with that and the heat he felt ready for his customary forty winks. He found his way to the guest house.

McKenna went round to the nursery. Davy lay in his pram. He was awake and sucked a gloved thumb. An unsatisfactory procedure which was accompanied by a ferocious scowl.

"How are you?" McKenna asked.

Davy grinned and said, "Grrrr," and his body swayed to and fro on account of the straps. His eyes were full to the brim with pleasure. "Do you want to play with a couple of blowsy twins?" McKenna asked. Davy laughed. "I'm sure you wouldn't like them." Davy was waiting, so he blew him a raspberry. The basset hound, as was his habit, appeared from nowhere. Davy was beginning to

take a great interest in the basset hound. The basset hound on his part reciprocated the interest. "That animal of yours," Gloria had said, "is training to become a nursery maid."

But McKenna knew better. The basset hound had a purpose. He would sit patiently beside the pram waiting for Davy to drop a biscuit or a toy. The biscuit would be devoured and the toy would be taken away and hidden. One morning McKenna saw his favourite dog chasing across the compound with a blue doll in his mouth. Now he suddenly wished that life should only consist of himself, Davy and the basset hound. There would be no complications, no fears and no venom. But where would Gloria come in? And if it were so simple would it be life? His epitaph, he thought, should be he had been neither one thing nor the other. But that was the epitaph of most people. "Well, Davy," he said, "when you can walk I'll take you to the umbrella thorns." Perhaps Davy would not like the trees. Not even the middle one. He lit a cigarette and waved the match before Davy. Davy was not interested.

"Sir," said Ali's voice, "Telegrams."

"Oh yes," he said and took the two envelopes.

"Good luck sir," Ali said; for he had a deep respect for telegrams. He never got one. Now and then the idea came to him to send himself a telegram; but he did not believe in spending money on non-carnal pleasures. He watched his master opening the first telegram and reading it; he watched his master opening the second telegram and reading it. His curiosity was beyond control. "Sir, good luck," he said piously.

"No, Ali."

"No good luck and very hot weather."

"Yes, it's very hot."

"Sir, poor gombis she all go away us."

McKenna nodded and Ali realised that notwithstanding his cunning small talk no news would be imparted to him. He waved to Davy and Davy gave him his always ready grin.

"She good Davy," Ali said and went his disappointed way.

Davy chirruped and pushed himself to and fro: without blinking the basset hound was gazing hard at him: and McKenna read the telegrams. The first telegram was from his sister Louisa. "Our beloved brother Alastair passed away peacefully last night at 10.30. Love and heartfelt sympathy from your bereaved sister Louisa." The second telegram came from Stevenage. It simply said: "Your brother died to-day 1st November. Please don't be unhappy." He looked at the envelopes. Louisa's cable was addressed to Sir David McKenna, the other was addressed to David McKenna. The bereaved

sister had not forgotten that he had become the seventh baronet. But Muriel had. It was kind of Muriel to have sent him that cable.

Of course it could not have been from anybody else. She must be in a way a wonderful woman because from that distance she could make him conscious of her. She had loved him. Probably she still loved him. Gloria did not love him. All those minutes she professed to hate (for so she had said that night on the island) Muriel would have taken gladly and added all her own minutes to them. Nevertheless he was looking forward to Gloria's return from Betty and he would feel strange and embarrassed if Muriel appeared before him. He ought to write to her and thank her for the cable. "Your uncle is dead," he said to Davy.

He looked up and there were white clouds coming from the direction of Mount Kenya and those heat containers were drifting aimlessly towards the umbrella thorns. So Alastair was dead and he should be somewhere up there above the heavy clouds. With Seraphim and Cherubim and the Holy Trinity. But for him Alastair was sitting in the dining-room near Stevenage watching his brother drink the port he was forbidden to taste. They had not been friends in their youths; those six weeks in Hertfordshire had almost made up for the unfriendly years; and with real brotherly love he wished that Alastair, if he was up there above the clouds, should be permitted and even encouraged to eat juicy Porterhouse steaks and drink port by the gallon; and since Alastair's life had culminated in perfect disappointment, he saw no reason why he should not be above the clouds. He watched the clouds with proprietary interest.

Davy shrieked. Shrieking being a recent discovery he indulged in it with gusto and no afterthought. "He would have made a very good uncle to you," McKenna said. What did Alastair say about the trees in his last letter? He could not remember. It did not matter. Alastair must know now much more about trees and people and other more important things. When you die you know everything. He had been told that as a child. Nothing had happened since his childhood to make him contradict it.

It was four o'clock. He had better go and wake up Laborde. He put the cables into his pocket.

Davy began to howl. "You mustn't do that," he said but Davy took no notice and howled louder. "Stop that," he said and then it occurred to him that Nanny would hear the noise and come, so he hurried away. Once he glanced back. Davy was still crying. He heard Nanny, and before he reached the guest house the howling stopped. Now Nanny, then other children, later school fellows and

then girls, then marriage and where would he come in ? "Wake up," he said much louder than he intended.

Laborde jumped up surprisingly quickly. "I'm ready," he said.

Gloria had not come back. McKenna scribbled her a chit in which he told her she should not wait for him with dinner because he was dining with Laborde. As they were driving through the township Laborde said pointing at the post office, "Did you get your cables ?"

"Yes, I did."

"Anything exciting ?"

"No, nothing special." He had decided not to mention Alastair's death. Laborde and later Gloria and then everybody else would say the appropriate words, and in all that talk and condoling the memory of Alastair would be completely submerged. And Gloria might go out of her way to be nice to him in bed because he was a bereaved brother and she the wife of a baronet. He was angry with himself. That was a disloyal thought. She was his wife and they were both healthy and in twenty years' time they would be labelled a happy, congenial couple. Do not ask for much and you will be happy. As regards Alastair he might tell her to-morrow. "I hope," he said, "that Eric isn't fussing too much."

(IX)

The undulating plains lay at the feet of the cedar forest. The grass was high, a soothing contrast to the dead land round Kampi ya Marwa. But for Eric there was nothing soothing about the plains and the world in general. He stood outside his hut and waited for the sun to set. The sun would be doing that in a short while. Masai came up to him and said that two heifers had got lost in the forest. Eric welcomed the news and set out with the boys; by the time they found the heifers night had come. The boys built immense fires. The fires made them feel at home, in fact it was home if there was a large fire. Eric's boy was preparing a meal for him. He called the boy and told him he did not feel well and would not eat. The boy being of the lazy variety jumped up and rushed off and joined the others near a huge fire.

Eric had made his mind up. First there had seemed to be several possibilities. One of them was to go up to Gloria and tell her she was a vile woman and should disappear and never be heard of again. A logical and simple plan. However it was not Gloria who really mattered. Only McKenna mattered. She had given proof that she was worthless and as far as he was concerned she had ceased to exist as a human being. It had been an awful shock to him but he would

get over it some time. Besides, at such moments one must not let one's hatred run away with common sense. His only interest was McKenna's interest. McKenna must not be made unhappy. Eric with his twenty-one years had never been in love, though that did not stop him from having a high opinion of love. Love was a shining light, a clear white flame and once it started it never ended. He had given love a lot of thought. Sooner or later it would come and find him with decks cleared for action. Love, needless to say, meant marriage, and into marriage another clear bright flame would enter. Loyalty. Love and loyalty the twin pillars of the bejewelled edifice of marriage; and there was Gloria rolling with another man under a tree.

He had seen her hand on the nape of Leonard's neck. Those fingers now floated before him. They were the symbols of depravity. But McKenna must not know. Apart from being a believer in love and marriage Eric prided himself on common sense. Though Gloria was a shameful creature Leonard was far worse than she. Eric had not met a man of Leonard's type before. He abhorred that girlish giggle of his, that soft sinewless body, and even his profession seemed useless and despicable. He must get rid of Leonard. Once Leonard was gone Gloria could be forced to behave decently. He would see to that.

Grimly he decided to see to it that Gloria behaved herself in the future. She deserved to be exposed, but that might hurt McKenna more than her. It must be patched up. He admitted that it was not a lofty plan; but to hell with loftiness if McKenna was not unhappy. So Leonard must be eliminated. He knew how to do that, provided Leonard was not in when he went round to Adams. He looked at his watch which had a luminous dial. Seven o'clock.

He left the hut, the moon was up and the forest was a compact forbidding carpet rising towards the stars and almost reaching them. It must be full of leopards and buffaloes. The hooting of the hyænas formed a vocal background to the night. There were clouds in the east. Funny, they should not be about at night during the dry season. He peered at them, craning his neck as a short-sighted person tries to read a poster high up on a wall. Were they rain clouds? No, that was out of the question. He was in for a run of bad luck and the drought was part of that. If only Gloria had not kissed Leonard there might have been a chance of their being rain clouds. He called Masai and said he was going out but would not stay away for long.

He sighed with relief when he was told by Adams's boy that Leonard was out.

"I don't know you," Adams said. The hurricane lamp was not smoking but the glass was so dirty that there was little light.

"You used to know me, sir," Eric said.

"Perhaps I did," Adams said and stepped back. "What is it you want?"

"I work for Major McKenna," Eric said still standing in the doorway.

"Why didn't you tell me that before?" Adams asked quite affably. "Come in and sit down. Have a drink." He waved a dirty hand. "Find yourself a glass. There must be some over there." Eric found a glass. "I didn't drink whisky for three months" Adams said in an important voice. "Then I only drank beer. Now I'm back on whisky. One needs variety and change. Now I'm enjoying my whisky as a new-born baby and sneer at myself for having been a teetotaler. When I was on the wagon I despised the boozier I was. Variety and change." He drank. "The ideal thing in life would be to possess all the variety that life could give. Life is full of it, only we don't take advantage of it. Take my father. He was a Tory. Spent his whole life being a Tory. Now if I had political opinions I'd be a Tory for three months, a Liberal for another three, a Socialist and then a Bolshie." He laughed gleefully.

Eric did not know how to begin. "Change," said Adams. "But you don't want change outside you. You want it within you. In this hut I've been thirty different people in one month. Who was the French writer who said there is more adventure in travelling round one's bedroom than going round the world?"

"I don't know."

"I'll have to look it up. Forgotten his name, dammit. A few great principles and a lot of change. What more could you ask from life."

Eric wondered how one could have great principles and be one day a Tory and the next a Communist.

"I explained that the other day to my nephew," Adams said. "He's a nice chap, has a certain understanding but takes life too easily. You've met him?"

Here's my cue, thought Eric. "Yes, I have, sir and I've come to speak to you on an urgent matter with which he is concerned. We all know in the district that you're McKenna's best friend."

Adams was flattered. "I am his friend," he said modestly. "But what's the trouble? You look so solemn."

"McKenna is being betrayed," Eric said dramatically.

"Come, come," said Adams. "Those are big words. What happened. Has an Indian sold him bad posho?" He laughed and slapped his thigh.

"It's a terrible business," said Eric and he told him what he had seen and Adams looked more solemn than he. "There is only one

thing to do," Eric summed up. "You must tell your nephew to clear out. He must go. He must."

Adams shook his head. "What's the good of sending my nephew away? Another man will come to-morrow. We must send her away."

"But how?"

"Leave it to me."

"I don't want McKenna to be hurt."

"McKenna won't be hurt."

"You're sure?"

"I'm sure." Then he burst out. "Married him for his money. A scheming bitch. Another Becky Sharp. The world is full of them."

"I know," Eric said, "that Mrs. McKenna deserves to be punished, but our first consideration is McKenna. Don't you think it would be simpler to send your nephew away?"

"I know which is the best way out for McKenna. You leave it to me."

"Your nephew. . . ."

"All right, young man, let it be my nephew. Here he is."

"A car," said Eric superfluously. "I don't want to meet him."

"Go out through that door, wait till he comes in, then go round the house, find your car, push it down the slope, and then he won't know you were here. One must always lay one's plans carefully."

"You'll help me?"

"There is nothing in the world I wouldn't do for McKenna."

But somehow Eric was not satisfied. He opened the door and went out. He wished he had not come.

When Leonard came in he found his uncle in front of the fire. "You look like the lord of the manor," he laughed.

"Hullo," grunted Adams.

"I've dined with some people called Newton. Do you know them?" Adams grunted again. "The man is priceless. He's madly idiotic. She's shrewd. I rather liked her. The husband's name is Reggie. Looks like Reggie." He went and sat down beside the fire. "What a cold night," he said. "I wouldn't mind a whisky."

"Help yourself."

Leonard poured out a drink. "Don't you want any?" he asked.

"Yes," said Adams.

So Leonard mixed him a drink. "You seem very quiet," he said.

"I'm tired," Adams said. "I'll go to bed in a moment."

"Nothing has upset you?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"You look so solemn."

"I was just thinking. Tell me Leonard what should be the final aim of man in life? You're a man of the world, you ought to know."

"I don't know. Never thought of it."

"That's a pity. With your brains and knowledge of the world you might have given me advice."

"What sort of advice?"

"Oh, I don't know. I feel rather depressed to-night, my boy. But let me put it the other way. Imagine you were a soldier. A soldier who drilled all his life. Then suddenly as he is approaching old age a war breaks out. What should he do? Keep out of it on account of his age or go to war to give his life-long training a chance?"

"But the old soldier would be so out of date with his old fashioned drill that he wouldn't have a chance in battle."

"I could prove to you that more battles were won by old soldiers than by young ones. The Napoleons are only an exception. But I don't want to talk about Napoleon. Some day I might give you a very interesting theory I have evolved about Napoleon. I think I have read at least a hundred books about him. Give me a drink." Leonard refilled his glass. "I like you, Leonard. You're a knowledgable young man. I like your company. We belong to a very sad brotherhood. The brotherhood of men. The life of man is full of pitfalls and which is even worse, temptations. I'm often deeply ashamed of being a man."

He is getting tight, thought Leonard. "I don't know," he said, soothingly. "Now and again it's rather fun being a man."

"Then one repents. What is important is to prove to oneself that one is above instincts, wishes, appetites and desires."

"It's so difficult that one shouldn't bother about it," Leonard said giving his uncle an encouraging smile.

"Give me a drink and I'll go to bed." Dutifully Leonard filled his glass. Adams gulped it down and then shook Leonard by the hand. "You'll be very grateful to me some day," he said.

"You're talking as if you were going on a long journey."

"We all have a long journey before us."

"Please, uncle, don't look so solemn."

"Good night, dear boy," Adams said and left him.

Leonard smoked a cigarette, then he turned out the light. An obscure impulse made him tiptoe to Adams's door. He opened it softly. Adams was sitting up in bed with a book before him. That peaceful sight relieved Leonard. He had had misgivings of which he could make neither head nor tail. Oh, how nerve-wrecking these

nights were with the glaring moon and the non-stop howl of the hyænas. He would tell Gloria to-morrow that he had been joking. Complications and intrigues and excitements were not for him. The moon said so.

(X)

Adams put the book down on the empty whisky case which served him as bedside table. He put it down gently, for he respected books whether they interested him or not. There surely must be somebody somewhere who liked books that bored him. So he must not be rough with a book. The book he had been reading was Marius the Epicurean. He had read it three times yet it still enthralled him. But he must concentrate on his plans and he gave the book a friendly smile and filled his pipe and lit it. He slept in his underwear. He had no time for pyjamas, in fact he possessed none. The khaki shirt was pretty dirty and the sleeves were rolled up showing sunburnt, surprisingly thin arms.

He must kill Gloria. That was simple. He must get her out of the way, that was the only solution. Eric was a fool. What was the good of sending Leonard away? A woman like her would take up another man at the next opportunity. Of opportunities there were many in this badly organized world; he had read of such opportunities in the many books he had read. And he had heard of many others. So Leonard was just a tool, a tool of no importance. He had no right to be angry with Leonard. He was not, and that was a further proof that he was on the right track. Gloria dead could resist temptations. Of that he was certain. It was better for McKenna to weep for a dear, dead wife than to have to suffer the pains of having been let down. The dead are great and lofty: the adulterous woman is despicable and the cuckold a laughing stock. Nobody should laugh at McKenna's expense.

For he loved McKenna. He knew that here was a great spirit but in chains because the world and its ways kept fine spirits in chains. He sighed because of the world and then smiled because of the great spirit the chains held so needlessly. A little burning ash fell on the blanket, made a small hole, but he did not notice it. Anyway there were plenty of burns in the blanket.

It would be a simple business to kill Gloria. She and Leonard would surely meet to-day. (It was already two in the morning.) He would follow Leonard; that was simple too. When the lovers parted he would shoot her, then bury the body. He could dig as deep a hole as anybody; even though the dry earth would be hard, very

hard. He knocked out his pipe against the whisky crate. Once rid of Gloria he would know how to look after McKenna. No more women for him. One must keep great spirits from temptation. He refilled his pipe. Later, it occurred to him that a little drink might help him in his vigil. He was not going to sleep. He was no fool. He knew that sleep often makes you change your mind. Leave it till next morning and that sort of nonsense. He would not leave it till next morning. There was no next morning. He was cheating it. He wished though that he could argue the matter with Laborde and McKenna. That was nonsense. If he discussed the matter with McKenna, McKenna would stop him from killing his wife; if he talked about it to Laborde, Laborde would have him arrested. You could not trust Laborde.

He tiptoed into the sitting-room, found a bottle of whisky and took it to bed with him.

The point was this: is retribution justified? There were, he remembered, many authorities who were in favour of retribution and there were some who were not. The religious point of view did not enter into it. He did not believe in God. He had worked out his disbelief carefully and could quote great minds all of which agreed with him. He drank a little whisky, then he drank more. He felt, so to speak, on the crest of his mind's wave. If, he thought, he took everything into consideration he could easily reach the conclusion that killing Gloria would not be an act of retribution but of prevention. Preventing further unfaithfulness was a good enough reason to do away with her. There were no authorities to dispute the importance of prevention. He nodded; for his track was the only right one.

Towards five in the morning he began to think of Gloria as a person. He hardly knew her. He had met her once or twice and he remembered that she was tall and had a pleasant voice. He liked good voices. It would be a curious experience to have to handle her dead body. He had not thought of that before. He sat up in bed and looked at his hands. They would touch the dead woman. Touch? They would drag her along and they would work hard while the hole was dug. His hands had a new interest for him.

A little later he got out of bed and found the revolver in a large box full of odds and ends. The revolver needed cleaning. He sat on the edge of the bed and cleaned the revolver; then he lay down and drank more whisky.

It was a wonderful sensation to have reached the great moment when he could show himself that he was loyal, strong and brave. He had waited for that moment all his life. He had dreamt of it.

To prove you have guts, to prove you can rise above yourself. Well, it had come to him.

There was no getting away from the fact that it would be a nasty business. Laborde would not dare to do it. He smiled because he was a better man than Laborde. He would have to shoot her at close range. Not pleasant. Eric had given him a description of the place where they had met. It would be the same spot, or a similar spot. He would hide behind a bush or a tree, it did not matter which, and then, in order not to complicate matters, he would shoot her without speaking to her or warning her. Warning her? That was an idiotic expression. You do not warn people you are going to kill. The bottle was getting empty.

Nobody would suspect him. There would be no clues. Though he read no thrillers he had read the Famous Trials Series, and lives of famous judges and K.C.s and he could have discoursed for hours on murder and why murderers were usually apprehended. Murderers? He laughed. He had nothing to do with murderers. He was no murderer: he was going to save his friend from unhappiness. Even if you have to shoot from behind you are not a murderer if you do it for a lofty reason. It was a pity that the bottle was empty.

There was another bottle somewhere in the house but he could not be bothered to go and search for that. He began to feel drowsy; but he was not going to let sleep get the better of him. This was his hour, the hour that would remain with him as a lifelong witness of his strength. His strength. If he let himself down that would be the end of him. But he would not let himself down. It would be a hard task, he would not enjoy it. Gloria must die. McKenna must be saved. He would go through with it, he would swallow the bitter, glorious pill. His mouth opened as if to swallow the pill, but only little snores came out one by one; and the night began to go.

PART SEVEN

(I)

THE HEAT BEGAN SOON AFTER SUNRISE. WHEN ALI went to wake his master it was already hot. Later on it would be insufferably hot. There were clouds in the sky: some of them were dark. The dark clouds were coming from the east. When he came with the breakfast two hours later he saw Nanny outside the nursery. He did not like her. She was a bad, ugly, old white woman and commanded the boys as if she had a certain standing. Ali knew she had not standing. You are of no importance if you have a bent back, a long nose and unbecoming white hair.

"Boy," she said to Ali, "where is my breakfast?"

"I'm taking the bwana's breakfast," said Ali. That was as far as he dared to go. He felt Nanny's eyes following him to the house. He did not dislike the sensation. The basset hound was standing at the dining-room door. As Ali opened the door he went in first. That angered Ali. "You dirty," he called after him. The basset hound wagged his tail and went out on to the verandah. What could Ali do? He followed him. "Breakfast sir," he said. "Madam, breakfast."

"Ali," Gloria said, "I think it will rain. What do you think?"

Ali worshipped Gloria. She came immediately after McKenna on his list of worshipping. She often talked to him and Ali adored her voice which was as fresh as her eyes and her skin. "Good luck, memsahib," he said, "if rain will come and gombis come home." The silence of the bomas and the sheds depressed him.

"I pray for rain every day," Gloria said after Ali went out.

"Then we ought to have rain," McKenna said. He hoped he had not said that clumsily. He wanted to tell her of Alastair's death. There was, however, time to talk of him. The dead are in no hurry.

"Betty and Reggie are coming to luncheon," Gloria said. "You don't mind?"

"Of course I don't. Gloria, why do you speak to me as if I were an ogre whom one must placate and of whom one should be afraid?"

"But I don't speak like that," she said frightened. "I never said you were an ogre. Please, David, I . . ."

"Darling, you misunderstand me. What I mean is that you shouldn't come and ask my permission for whatever you want to do. Please don't be so very good. You're too good. I'm afraid of all that goodness." He blushed.

"I'm not as good as that," she said and now it was her turn to blush.

They stood there wordless and confused and then he said lightly and sadly, "I have no cause to complain. Well, I must be off."

She came up to him, put her arms round him and kissed him on his forehead, then pressed her face against his.

"I'd do anything in the world for you," she said.

"So would I."

"But you have."

He shook his head and then said, "I must be off."

She walked with him to the garage and waited till he drove off. She waved even after the car had turned the corner. On her way back from the garage she had to pass the nursery. Nanny was carrying Davy to the pram. She stopped and watched the proceedings. Anyway, Nanny would not be able to tell her next employer that she had run away from her husband. For after a whole day's trepidation she had made her mind up.

It had been difficult. Yesterday afternoon while she sat with Betty there had been moments when she almost blurted it out. But she could not. She knew what Betty would have said and she was afraid of Betty because Betty had the habit of invariably being in the right. So she had to thrash it out all alone. She lay awake in bed and there was a bat in the room but she was so preoccupied with her thoughts that she did not notice it. Leonard was an attractive person and full of fun. You could laugh with him almost as much and as heartily as you had laughed with Miles. Miles used to laugh a lot. She shed a few tears because the memory of that laughter did not fit in with the grave in which Miles lay so completely dead, and days and months going by without them knowing him who was dead down in the earth. And with tears sitting on both cheeks she asked herself whether Miles would approve of her leaving McKenna and going off with Leonard.

She had been Miles's wife for six years, and that meant that for six years they had lain side by side, every night, excepting the one week when Miles had gastric flu and it was better for him to sleep alone. She had seen him shave, brush his teeth and she knew his thoughts and reactions which were so smoothly blended with her thoughts and reactions. Miles would not approve of her going off with Leonard. Because she had seen him wash his teeth and because she knew that he came out in a rash if he ate curry, she could clearly hear him advising her not to leave McKenna. For McKenna had been good to her and had been Miles's friend; and he was bringing up Miles's son. Often she had felt a strong dislike for the child. All the burning pain of giving birth to it and then to find herself a widow. But Davy was Miles's son; and McKenna would look after him. You could rely

on McKenna. That was what Miles had said of him. There was another consideration. McKenna was a link with Miles. Leonard was not. As long as she held on to McKenna she was holding on to Miles. When dawn came she slept a little and when she awoke she went on with her thoughts. She had seldom found time to think of the hereafter but whenever she did she saw the proverbial marble hall and there was incidental music in the background. If she had listened long enough to that music she might have discovered that it was the tune of *Dinah*, a tune she had fancied when she was nineteen and danced every night. Into that marble hall she would come one day. Miles would be standing beside a column. "Here you are, darling," he would say. "Thank you, David, for having looked after Gloria. Now you can step aside, David." McKenna being the man he was would step aside without a murmur and she and Miles would walk above the stars in all eternity. But it might be a different matter with Leonard. What if he did not step aside?

Because she was a trifle refreshed by her sleep she began to visualise that heavenly scene once more. She was coming through the pearly gates, the celestial band was playing and she looked towards the column where Miles usually stood. She sat up in bed and leaned forward and it was not Miles but McKenna who stood there. She was frightened and quickly tried to conjure up Miles. He would not come. she tried hard but McKenna took his place every time. When she saw him at breakfast she well-nigh felt like asking him if he remembered standing there beside that column in Heaven.

Davy was in the pram, the hood was up and Nanny with her white topi and bent back began to push the pram out of her sight. It was only then that she noticed that she had been standing in the dust of the compound, motionless with the thoughts and images of the night before sailing past her. Again there was no Miles.

As she walked over to her farm to meet Leonard she could not help listening to many sharp treacherous voices that spoke in her mind. They spoke against Miles because there was no longer Miles to defend himself. She hurried from those voices.

She was a good walker and arrived at the clearance on her farm five minutes too soon. She stood near the same tree and smoked a cigarette. She was thirsty and wished she had a drink. A John Collins or something like that. The clouds were getting darker but were not coming any nearer. There was no sun. The heat was like a heavy load. She saw a bushbuck standing hardly twenty yards from her. The bushbuck was looking at her pensively. Suddenly the bushbuck bolted and sweating profusely, Leonard appeared.

"I left the car beside the bridge," he said. "It was rather frightening

coming here. I'm sure some awful animal followed me." He sat down beside a bush. "Don't smile. I'm sure I have been followed."

"I was followed the other day by a leopard."

"But my dear girl, I'm not one of your brave head-hunters of Borneo."

"We're not in Borneo. Perhaps that potty uncle of yours has followed you." She laughed because she was past worry.

"Not he," Leonard said. "Though he's a queer bird, I must admit. When I got up this morning he had already left the house. Now tell me where the hell could he have gone at six or seven this morning?" Any sort of small talk would do, provided the main issue was kept at bay.

"I'm telling you he followed you."

"I wouldn't like that."

"I wouldn't mind as long as he washed himself." She laughed out loudly, then in a gentle voice she said, "Leonard, I have made up my mind." She sat down beside him. She was not looking at him and there was a sorrowful frown on her forehead. She had rehearsed every word she was going to say. "Leonard, I'm not going away with you. I'm staying with David."

Leonard felt relieved yet it hurt him. "So you don't love me," he said. She was adorable and there was no doubt about that.

"It isn't that," she said. "I think you're sweet. But I'm not going to leave David."

"I see." He was out of the wood but by God it would have been fun to take her to London.

"But let's remain friends," Gloria said.

"Yes," he said; and then he said, "You're wonderful." He was deeply moved and he wished McKenna should make her happy, tremendously happy, madly happy. She put her hand on his knee and Leonard looked nostalgically at her hand and in a distant, impersonal manner he was sorry that neither of them had been serious about it. He took the hand and passed his fingertips along it in the manner you touch an objet d'art in an antique shop, which is too expensive for your purse.

"Are you unhappy?" Gloria asked. She had heard the sounds of something moving but she did not want to frighten him and kept to herself.

"I'm miserable," Leonard said.

"You can kiss me for the last time."

So he kissed her for the last time and while he kissed her she prayed she should never again kiss any other man but her husband. Then she pushed him away. "Now go back to your car," she said, "and

drive to the house and you must stay for luncheon and please, Leonard, we must never speak about this again."

"I suppose not. But for God's sake be happy with your husband."

"Leave it to me," she said very unsure of herself. Then she said. "Perhaps I am happy."

"Yes, you are happy, say you are happy, of course you're happy."

"You're a nice person."

He got up and gave her his hand and helped her to her feet; in a praiseworthy old world manner he kissed her hand.

"Now run along," she said.

"I wish you'd see me to the car. I'm sure something followed me here."

"I can't. Off you go. Don't be a coward."

"Perhaps I'll be killed. What a fitting end." They both laughed. His laughter was less convincing.

She watched him till he disappeared, then she began to walk back. Her mind was a pleasant blank. Suddenly she stopped. She was being followed. She listened attentively and she heard heavy movements in a bush. She waited, there was silence and she walked on. Shortly afterwards she stopped again. There was no doubt about it this time. She waited and the undergrowth moved and a head emerged. "Come here," she shouted. Very much ashamed of himself, looking and feeling guilty the basset hound came up to her, tail wagging frantically, apologetically. Gloria put her arm round his fat neck. She was moved and because she was superstitious she thought that McKenna's dog escorting her back home was a symbol of many pleasant things to come. But because she was a woman she could not resist saying, "Spying on me, eh?" Abashed, the basset hound wagged his tail.

(II)

A Wanderobo with a martial mien, smelling of red paint, was swaggering along the cedar forest. He was in good form and once or twice fetched a branch a corker with his manly lance. All of a sudden the swagger went. He saw a white man lying on the ground. The white man was dead and his spirit might be hovering near him ready to do mischief. For that was the way of spirits. Curiosity got the better of his fear and he squatted beside the dead white man who had an envelope pinned to his shirt. A revolver lay on the ground and there was not much left of the white man's head. The Wanderobo jumped up because his curiosity somewhat satisfied, fear began to get the better of him. He was quick on his feet and he was lucky in a sense: the moment he reached the track he saw a car advancing.

Not too coherently he explained to Laborde (whose car it was) that he had found a dead man. Laborde accompanied him back to the tree near which the body lay. It took Laborde some time to recognise Adams.

"Good God," he said, "haven't seen such a mess since the last war." He was very calm because you should not lose your head in front of a native. He knew the Wanderobo was watching every movement of his.

"What killed the bwana?" the Wanderobo asked.

"Lion," said Laborde. You do not speak of suicide to natives. "You go to my farm and send two boys," Laborde said. He wanted to be rid of him. In the white man's presence the Wanderobo did not fear the ghost, so he obeyed the order reluctantly. Once Laborde was alone he got busy. He examined the revolver, then with a lot of self-control he leaned over the wound. It was a thorough job. "You damned fool," he said. He only felt anger. You do not do things like that. He wished Adams could come back to life for a few minutes. A few minutes would be ample time to tell him where he got off; but apparently Adams had got off without him having to tell him. "You damned fool," he said again. Of course he would be sorry, of course he would miss his crazy talk, but now there was such anger in him that he felt it was choking him. "Steady," he said to himself.

He walked round in a circle in order to calm down. He had been given a cigar by an Indian storekeeper in Kampi ya Marwa. It was a cheap cigar. Now he lit it. His hands were surprisingly steady. Puffing away he returned to the corpse.

"So that's the way it's done," he said. "Where did you read that? I wish I could throw that book at your head."

He leaned forward and caught sight of the envelope which Adams had pinned on his chest. It was addressed to "Major David McKenna." Laborde took the letter. He looked at the envelope, then glanced at the dead man, then he opened the envelope. He would repent for his behaviour later on. When he began to read the letter he decided he had no cause for repentance present or future.

It was a long letter full of quotations and the handwriting was unsteady. It told McKenna of Gloria and Leonard and repeated everything Adams had heard from Eric, giving Eric as the source. Then Adams described his own reactions and his decision to kill Gloria. Then he frankly admitted that the last moment his courage failed him. To kill a woman needed more heroism than he, Adams, possessed. But he had enough strength to kill himself, so he would do so and let his death remain a memento of the unfaithfulness and

depravity of Gloria. He was certain that McKenna would cast her out and if any other woman came near him let him remember his friend's death and turn his back on her. "I would have simplified matters," the letter concluded, "if I had killed her, but my death is the next best thing. The only immortality I crave is to live in your memory. Be alone and aloof and forget me not."

"You dirty bastard," Laborde said. "You vile madman."

He held his cigar menacingly. Of course he was mad, one must forgive him because he was mad. But he was a bad madman.

"You dirty bastard," he said again and just succeeded in checking his boot from kicking the corpse.

There was utter silence in the forest. It was darkish because there was no sun. Laborde stood immobile staring at what was left of Adams's face. The silence went. He could hear native voices and he put the letter into his pocket. "I'll burn this, you lunatic," he said; and because you must not be rude to the dead and because Adams had loved McKenna he said, "You will live in his memory because I'm going to burn this letter. I'm far too kind to you."

The boys arrived. They stood at a respectable distance and Laborde gave them orders quickly. Two should stay near the corpse, the third boy would go with him to the Kampi ya Marwa police station to guide the policeman to the dead man. The two boys were not enthusiastic about staying in the forest but they said yes, they would not budge an inch. The moment Laborde left, they left the corpse and went and sat at a distance of several hundred yards. They would, at any rate, hear any approaching car.

Laborde's mind worked fast as his car jerked along the rough track. What was the truth about Gloria and Leonard? He must find out, but the first thing was to shut Eric up. Whatever happened the story must not leak out. He thought that if Gloria and Leonard were lovers then let McKenna find out. But not through him. He was willing to open a dead man's good-bye letter addressed to somebody else but he would not give away a woman. He straightened his humpy fat back and felt twenty years younger, in fact almost young. The white policeman was out, so he drove on to the D.C. It was getting on to one and he would not be at the office any more. The idea of disturbing him during his meal did not upset Laborde. He tried to think of Adams but only anger rose and out of pity for the dead he decided not to think of him till he calmed down. He looked in through the dining-room-window. It was a large window, very unusual for P.W.D. windows.

The D.C. and his wife were eating mutton and roast potatoes. She seemed pregnant again. The D.C. was talking to her earnestly.

Boyish smiles relieved the sad accompanying look. Probably, thought Laborde, he was explaining Native Paramountcy. Decorously he resisted the desire to knock on the window. He went round to the front door.

"My dear Laborde," said the D.C. when the house boy shepherded him in. "Come and join us and eat a chop."

"I'm afraid I can't accept your kind hospitality," Laborde said. "In fact I must have a word with you. I hope you don't mind." He bowed to the mother of twins. "But you know how gruesome life is out here in the jungle." He went to the sitting-room and the D.C. followed him.

"For God's sake what's the matter?" the D.C. asked.

"Adams has killed himself," said Laborde; and as he said that it occurred to him for the first time that he would never again have an argument with Adams. Adams was a swine but Adams was dead.

"I knew," bleated the D.C. "I knew he'd disgrace us. I'm not surprised." He looked at his shoes. "Why should it have happened here?" He looked up. "Now who is that?"

A formidable shadow had appeared in the doorway.

"I hope," said Bignell, the storekeeper, coming into the room, "that I'm not intruding. But all us cannibals are dangerous people." He laughed. He was tight. It was his habit to get tight around lunch-time. In the evenings he got drunk. "But. . ."

"What's the matter, Bignell?" the D.C. asked. He would not have been surprised if Bignell had admitted a bit of cannibalism. Not one of his old stories, but something fresh, hardly an hour old.

"I have very interesting news," Bignell said. "McKenna's brother died the other day. Now he's the baronet."

"You don't say so," the D.C. said in a more cheerful tone. A baronet in the district almost offset the disgraceful act of suicide.

(III)

Nanny gave Davy an uninterested look. Forty-three or forty-four, it did not matter which. Her suitcase was packed. It was a large suitcase of the old-fashioned type. There were a few parcels, rather untidy, for her hand had trembled—which was not surprising. She was white with indignation. Indignation affected her in that way. Davy was sitting up playing with the toy motor-car which once again had found its way into the pram. Nanny put on her best terai. That was the final touch. She went outside and forgot to give Davy a last glance. But that did not matter either. She could hear the cars returning.

She stood outside the nursery, her feet firmly planted in the red

dust. The clouds were low and heavy but they did not interfere with her thoughts which consisted of anger and a curious sense of self-satisfaction. She for one was alive, she for one had not killed herself. Ali emerged from the kitchen. "Boy," she called harshly, "bring out my suit case and parcels." Ali walked on towards the house. Nanny was not annoyed: it was what she should have expected from the start.

She was disappointed that the D.C. was not among the arrivals. Never mind, if those people did not let her go she would find means and ways to have them prosecuted. She was righteousness and she was the law: morally, so to speak. She waited for the cars to stop outside the house. The dogs ran up barking and she walked forward with her Sunday terai sitting grimly on her grey head. They were not noticing her. That suited her mood.

"What I want to know," said Reggie, "is who told Bignell about David's brother's death." He and Laborde were standing in Nanny's path.

"Now who the hell do you think told him," Laborde said.

"The Babu. Are you surprised?"

"I should be," said Reggie and then he began to laugh.

"Come in, chaps, and have tea," called Gloria.

Nanny watched Laborde and Reggie follow the others in. Eric went last. He seemed to droop.

Nanny waited a little. It was not the right thing to disturb one's employers while they were having tea. She stood and heard Davy crying. It was getting on to his tea time, too; but since she had abdicated it was no longer her concern. She looked idly at the three cars. One of them would have to drive her to the station. It was lucky that on Fridays the train for Nairobi only left at six. It was now four-thirty. She would give them another ten minutes. Ali came out with a tray. That decided her not to wait another ten minutes. She felt a heavy drop of rain on her beaky nose. She hoped it would not rain till she reached the station.

"Mrs. McKenna," she said as she opened the sitting-room door, "I wish to tell you that I'm leaving you. I wish to be driven to the station."

"But Nanny," said Gloria, "what's the matter?"

"When the District Commissioner was here I couldn't help overhearing that a friend of yours made away with himself. I don't want to stay here any longer. I'm going. I insist on being driven to the station." She was ready to shriek.

"But Nanny," said Gloria, "that has nothing to do with us. It isn't our responsibility. Come on, Nanny."

"Mrs. McKenna, I'm leaving. I am going." She was trembling

with hysterical anger. She must go. Nurse Parkinson would have to give up her job too and they must have the cottage. Now or never.

"I won't stay with you," she shrieked.

"I'll drive you to the station," McKenna said. "Tell the nursery boy to put your stuff into my car."

"And the quicker the better," said Betty. "Never heard such nonsense in my life."

"I don't want a testimonial from you," Nanny said. "I have enough testimonials, thank you." Forty-one to be precise. You could almost paper the walls of a cottage with them.

"And I know," she said in a final voice, "that it was your brother who did that disgraceful thing, Major McKenna."

Reggie burst into laughter. That was the best one he had ever heard. Adams McKenna's brother. Heehee.

"In a sense he was my brother," McKenna said. "We're leaving, Nanny."

"Let Eric drive her to the station," Laborde said. "Don't you agree Eric?" He smiled sweetly. He had had a few words with Eric while the D.C. and the policeman were examining the body, at the end of which he almost asked Eric to burn Adams's letter for him.

"Yes, indeed," said Eric. "Come on." That was for Nanny. "I think Lady McKenna wants you out of this place as soon as possible."

"Now don't behave like a Colonial," Laborde smiled at him. Nanny hurried out. It was over: she was safely on her way to Nurse Parkinson and the cottage. She could hear Davy shrieking fiercely. She could not resist it: she turned back. "The child is crying, he wants his tea." Then she followed Eric to the car.

"You're getting old," Eric growled. "You're mixing up everything in your stupid old mind. It wasn't Sir David's brother who died. It was somebody altogether different. Jump in!"

Nanny did not bother to answer but she looked back and saw three figures hurrying towards the nursery. As the car shot out of the compound the rain came down. In a few moments the world looked like frosted glass.

"Thank God," said Betty. "Isn't God merciful?" She was the first to reach the nursery. She picked up Davy who ceased crying. "Don't worry, love, I'll look after you till a new nanny arrives."

"Give him to me, darling," Gloria said. "He wants his tea."

"No, darling. I'll give him his tea. I know how to feed a child." She spoke brightly and Gloria approached her smiling brightly.

"Now don't be silly," Gloria said. "I know perfectly well how to feed him. Give him to me, darling."

McKenna stood in the doorway and said nothing. He was leaning

forward because it was difficult to catch their words on account of the downpour. There was now darkness on the other side of the frosted glass.

"Gloria," said Betty taking a step back, "don't overdo it. Let me feed him. We'll put him to bed together and to-morrow I'll come over and give him breakfast. As a matter of fact don't you think, David, it would be a good idea for me to have him till you find a new nanny?"

"Give him to me, darling," Gloria said very calmly. "We don't want a row, do we? He's my child, you know, darling."

"I know perfectly well that he's your child. I only say that you haven't the faintest idea of how to look after a child. Now Gloria, let's be calm."

"Give him to me, you bitch. David, take him away from her. How dare you, Betty? Give him to me. He's my child."

"Calm yourself, Gloria. You'd hold him upside down."

"Give him to me. He's my child. You're a barren old. . . ."

She grabbed Davy who was enjoying himself tremendously. Betty let go of him. Gloria took him in her arms and began to cry. "She wants to take you away from me." She took him into the night nursery and Betty heard her shout, "Child by parcel post," and then the door banged.

"David," she said. But she saw that McKenna had left. She stood for a few minutes panting with a sort of despair; then she went to the door and opened it and said, "Let me help you at least, Gloria. I don't want to be nasty. I only want to help."

"All right," said Gloria in a condescending voice, "as long as you don't start making a fool of yourself again."

Outside, the rain was beating down hard and it was like night and both the policeman and the D.C. were worried because it would be difficult to bury Adams to-morrow or even the day after. The body might come floating up again with the coffin acting as a hooded gondola. The sick cattle were dying and the rain went on throughout the night and the sick cattle were dead in the morning. The sun came out from behind the clouds and immediately the clouds closed and the rain shrieked down. On the station platform McKenna and Laborde hardly succeeded in saying good-bye to Leonard. He seemed dim to them and they seemed dim to him, and when Leonard waved to them for the last time from the train his arm seemed to be cutting through the rain.

"He was a damned nice chap," shouted Laborde.

McKenna's car, notwithstanding the chains, stuck on the way back

and he had to tramp to the farm and get his eight A.M.T. oxen to pull the car out of the deep, fat mud.

"Oh darling," Gloria said when he appeared in the nursery soaked to the skin. "I thought you'd never come."

(IV)

There was a lull in the rain and the clouds having obligingly parted for an hour or so, the sun shone through and made the young shoots look riotously green. Davy was not interested in the sun and the new grass. He was sitting upright in his pram and now and then he clapped his hands. After a while it became a bore, yet he went on clapping. That astonished him. Suddenly a gorgeous creature, a wonderful apparition entered his orbit. His hands became still. A huge lizard with a red neck pushed itself out from behind a stone and Davy's eyes were large with wonder and happiness. That red lizard was the final proof that the world was the best that had ever existed and every minute and every hour would add a drop or so to the cup of happiness which was the cup of life. The lizard disappeared behind another stone. He forgot it before its disappearance could have disappointed him.

He began to talk. There was a lot to be said and since he had not to bother with words he said all he wanted, unhampered and there was no need for a meaning. The face he liked so much came to the pram.

"What do you think of the sunshine?" it asked.

Davy talked a bit and then clapped his hands. The man with the face he cherished was standing beside the balustrade. He and the balustrade belonged to each other. A fat podgy face to which he seldom reacted came and peered at him.

"How are you, you young millionaire?" the fat thing asked.

The new sweet face came next. Though it might mean a bath or a changing of nappies, he grinned and there came an answering grin and he got very coy.

"Look, David," the new face said. "Leonard's article and my photo."

Davy watched McKenna taking the fashion magazine which Gloria held open for him. Though Davy stared hard he could not see the picture of Gloria standing in front of the umbrella thorn.

"Why did he photograph you there?"

"Because it's my favourite spot, David. I love sitting there under that tree. I can think of everything there, the past and the future and it is so pleasant."

McKenna's answer if there was one was drowned by a happy shriek. It came from Davy. He had caught sight of that gorgeous lizard with the red neck.

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